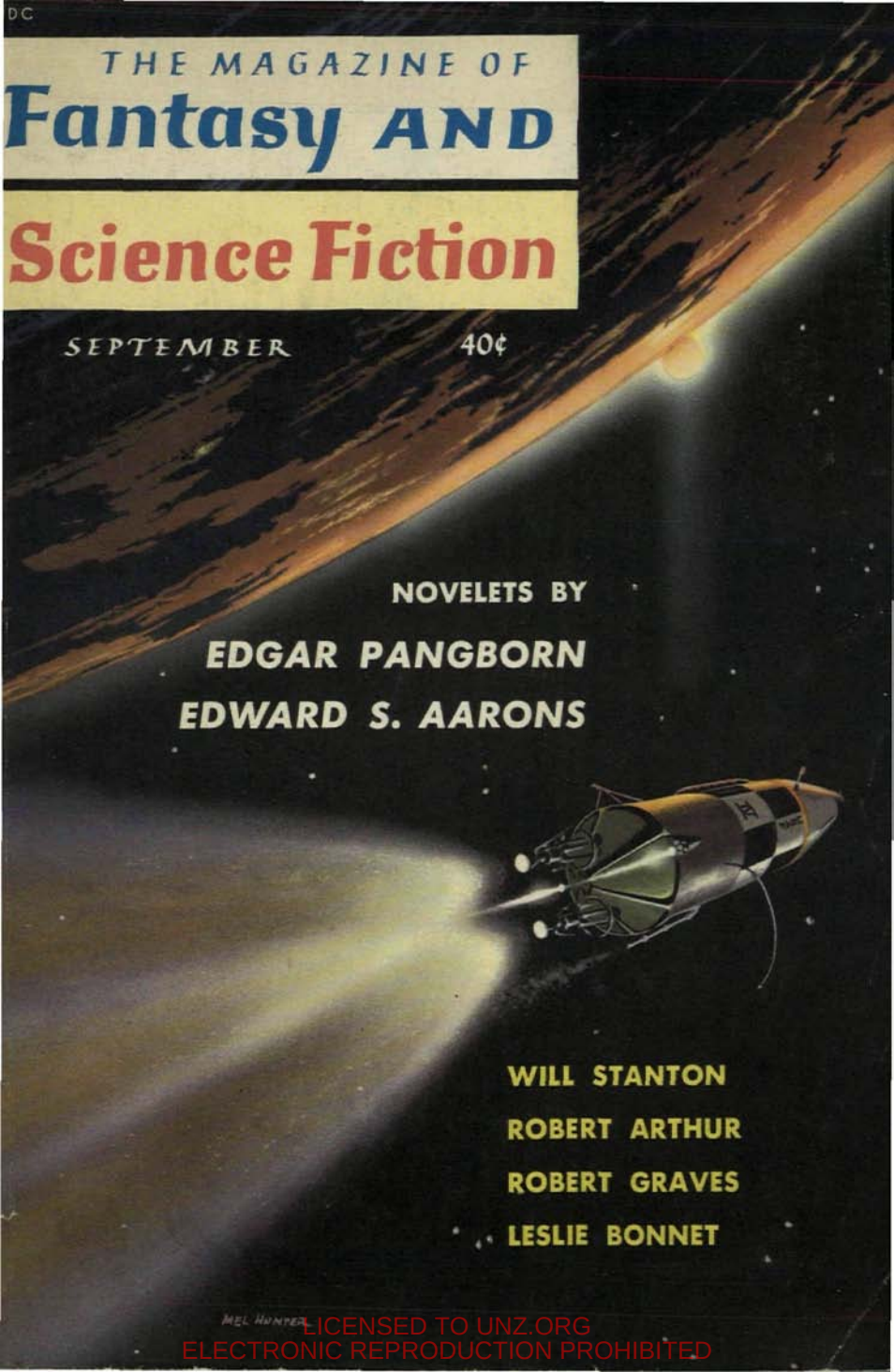

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

SEPTEMBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Robert P. Mills*, EDITOR

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In this issue . . .

The title of this paragraph really should be "On this issue . . ." since it is given over to Mel Hunter's fine cover. Here is Mr. Hunter's own description:

"Project Vega:

"The Atlas ICBM will be coupled with a new, highly sophisticated second stage rocket, now under development, to launch payloads of from 2,000 to 5,000 lbs. into orbit. New second stage, called the Vega, will utilize kerosene and liquid oxygen as propellants to fire its modified Vanguard powerplant.

"Vega may be used to hoist a 36 inch robot telescope of new design into circular 500 mile orbit within several years."

If you like the cover as much as we do, you might like to have a full-color proof of it with no type. For a way to get such a proof, see page 39.

Coming next month . . .

. . . an extra special 10th Anniversary All Star issue, with 32 extra pages. Among the many features will be the first installment of a two-part serial by Robert A. Heinlein. Titled "Starship Soldier," it is another of Mr. Heinlein's wonderfully credible tales of a future civilization, together with some of the best description we've seen of the soldier of the future, including his training, and his dangerous, driving part in warfare on other planets. . . . Also present will be Robert Nathan, with a delightful, satiric account of the adventures of the first two men on Venus, and the civilization they meet there. . . . And Poul Anderson will be back, with "Operation Incubus" (based on an idea, incidentally, sent to him by a reader whose address he has lost; Mr. Anderson says that if she will look him up at the Detroit convention, he and Stephen Matuchek would be delighted to buy her a drink and offer their thanks in person). . . . Zenna Henderson offers "And a Little Child . . ."—which, though not a People story, is stamped with Miss Henderson's special touch. . . . And Howard Fast returns with "The Martian Shop," and there will be many, many others.

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Edgar Pangborn lives on a farm in upstate New York, where he smokes too much (there is a tarry circle on the ceiling above his desk), writes too little (for our taste, at least), and grows superb strawberries. . . . The present novelet concerns the adventures of an advance exploratory team on a new planet; and Mr. Pangborn's characterization-in-depth, solidly worked-out imaginative concepts, and first-class narrative and descriptive powers make it a most rewarding reading experience.

THE RED HILLS OF SUMMER

by Edgar Pangborn

I

MIRANDA CAUGHT MY HAND, HER own soft small hands gone hard with tension. Captain Madison on the speaker's platform had mentioned the pilot mission, and possible lethal elements on the shining dot below us—bacteria, viruses, qualities of the lower atmosphere not discoverable from orbit. It had not dawned on me till then that my troubled Miranda might be desiring the pilot mission for herself and me. For the last year she had been in the shadow of private unhappiness, often remote even when she was in my arms.

Below us. For the first time in fifteen years that word *below* was more than a reference to the place where your feet happened to be. It possessed a meaning in relation to the ship, to me as a unit of living matter, to black-haired Miranda.

Madison's square face recaptured my attention. I had first glimpsed it at the beginning of the voyage, when I came aboard with the unsparing eyes of a boy of twelve. That year he was thirty-five. Now at fifty he looked little changed—more tired, hair grayer, voice flatter. Who wouldn't be tired, after the job of bringing our enormous sphere into a safe orbit? My own healthy red-haired carcass felt exhausted too, from the excitement that had churned in all of us since the planet was sighted and we knew we must decide whether to risk a descent. We were in the meeting-room now, all

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three hundred, to make that decision.

I, David Leroy, am not a scientist nor a technician. Miranda and I were Randies—chosen like most of the kids for good health and what the Builders' Directives solemnly call Random Talents. There's a pride in it. You discover the virtues of comprehensive wide-ranging ignorance.

Captain Rupert Madison was saying: "If we go on, I don't suppose any of you, even children born in space, would live to see the end of the journey. The distances are too vast, Earth-type planets too far apart. The chance of finding another as promising as this one, within our lifetime, is small. The other choice is to go down—and stay."

It was that simple. A huge frail sphere like ours, built to transport a colony for generations if necessary, doesn't land anywhere. You don't take it into atmosphere. Compartmented and honeycombed, spheres within spheres down to the core where the computer hummed its mathematical daydreams, the ship *Galileo* was designed for one purpose only: to bear our splinter fragment of humanity away from a world that humanity had apparently ruined, away to some cleaner place where the sickness in our germ plasm might work itself out—perhaps, always perhaps, and only after many generations. That errand performed, the emptied shell of Galileo would shine on as a satellite, a golden moon circling a second-chance world.

When you live in close awareness of it for fifteen years, even the new curse of Cain can become a commonplace. But I had been obliged to learn it was not so for Miranda. Her trouble was there, a sense of futility forced on her by the radiation sickness of Earth: for what, her heart said, is the point of a million years of human evolution if it must end not even with a bang, only with the whimper of babies born armless, distorted, blind? She had grown terrified of the times when she couldn't *care* about anything. "Not even about you, Davy . . ."

Captain Madison was hammering home the truth of no return, speaking of what it requires—in terms of industry, labor, raw materials—to build just one launching center like the twelve that toiled eight years to send the bits and pieces of this vessel out of Earth's gravity. Earth had bled herself white for her children, after men once and for all faced the probability of racial extinction. They would build another *Galileo*, and another; would go on doggedly building, all else subordinated, so long as any courage and equipment remained. "The gravity of that planet down there is a bit greater than the gravity of Earth. Launching centers!" Madison said.

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"I remember. That was my life, you know, from teens into thirties, beginning as a grease monkey at Canaveral . . . Well, you know the arithmetic: three hundred colonists don't reproduce a technology that was based on a population of three billion.

"The know-how? We have it all, in the microfilm library. Raw materials, yes—down there we'll find the same minerals, same general chemical pattern. But the building of launching centers, new ships, the reconquest of space if you want that inflated language—let's say it just might be an enterprise of our great-great-grandchildren, if we have any, if enough of them are healthy and active human beings, and if space travel happens to be what they want most, at any cost, in their own far-off time."

Nobody sighed or fidgeted, as many would have done if this had been another pep-talk by our Psychometric Coordinator Cecil Dorman, known to Miranda and me and others of the irreverent as Cecil Psycho.

"The planet is habitable," said Captain Madison, "so far as we know from orbit study." Miranda felt my look but would not return it; her hands grasping mine were cold. "So far as we know," he repeated, "in advance of the pilot mission—which will consist of two men and two women who will go down, maintain radio contact at least four weeks, and make the final tests we can't make up here. Your only vote in this meeting, I suppose, will be to decide whether the pilot mission starts at all—remembering that whatever they find, those four volunteers can't come back."

Behind me, I heard the suave voice of Andrea del Sentiero—fifty-eight, the only colonist older than Madison. His official title was Historian. "Does anything in the latest studies suggest a civilization?"

"Nothing, sir. Forest, savannah, large lakes, marshes, deserts, mountain ranges running generally north and south, a few of the summits snow-capped." He was talking for all of us, who had had only brief chances at the telescopes; the view-plate in the panel behind him gave a low magnification, the planet a blur of blue and reddish green. "Six continental land masses paired north and south, three main oceans, polar caps small and broken up. Bound to be dense tropics near the equator, the rest sub-tropical, with narrow temperate zones. No roads in the open areas, nothing like cities. No vessels on the seas, river mouths surrounded by the same vegetation that covers most of the land. The reddish green deepens on the seaward slopes of the hills, but that suggests—Dr. Bunuan agrees—a result of rainfall,

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not intelligent agriculture. Dr. Bunuan thinks we may find something like Earth in the time of dinosaurs. He calls that a half-educated guess."

"Quarter-educated," the biologist's mellow voice corrected him.

Captain Madison grinned. "If you insist, José. No, Andrea, if there's life at the social, technological level it would have to be hidden under forest cover—unlikely."

"Yes," said del Sentiero. "I have no other questions."

"Maybe something to add?"

"Only two things," said the Historian. "One, that my vote will be for going down and making the best of it. Two, that the pilot mission ought to be a privilege of the old."

Captain Madison winced. "You mean, why risk the young?"

Del Sentiero said nothing. I knew, without seeing, the stoical Latin shrug, the dark eyes contemplating eternity, the mild outward motion of eloquent hands.

"Anyone may volunteer for it," said Madison heavily, and he shut his eyes, his face freezing into difficult calm. "Responsibility for choosing the four is on me, Andrea, nowhere else." His eyes flew open, probing here and there. "Questions? Discussion?"

I had expected that Paul Cutter would seize this moment to sound off on the revision of the model constitution, which could not even begin to function until after a landing. The constitution was an attempt of the Builders to suggest the framework of such government as a colony of 300 might be expected to need. Mirthless and lonely Paul Cutter had grappled with it, conceiving amendment after amendment, identifying his unhappy self with each improvement to the point of monomania. He ate and drank the constitution, slept and got up with it. At any time his blaring monologue might nail you to the wall explaining how it *must* be amended or the whole expedition would Betray the Human Heritage.

Paul was younger than Miranda and myself, a boy of ten at the start of the voyage. Some hereditary slant made him grow from a normal-looking child into a small bandy-legged man, gnarled, not misshapen but seeming so, a bulging head connected by a weak neck to a tight barrel of torso. A bore, comical and ugly through no fault of his own. He had chosen psychology as his field of specialization, becoming a noisy satellite of Cecil Dorman. Unfortunately for Paul's ambitions, not Dorman but the learned, humorous and peaceful Dr. Carey was boss of the Psychology Department. (*Galileo* was certainly in its way a college; I still think of it so.) Paul Cutter never earned a title: a Randy still, the fact no source of pride to him but an ingrowing pain.

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I saw Cutter in the front row, big head alertly cocked. Nothing happened. No fresh amendment, no bray of earnest argument. Maybe Cecil Dorman had persuaded him to let the constitution wait a minute or two . . .

We were voting, by a simple show of hands. No opposition. No one could bear the thought of another fifteen years, or another generation, or another century, in space. But I remember that when my own hand went up I was not thinking of that, but of red-green seaward hills, and of the sound of ocean that might resemble what I had heard when I was a boy at Martha's Vineyard watching the loud hurry and change of waves under the sudden winds of September.

I believe this was the only unanimous decision ever taken by the colonists of the planet Demeter.

Madison was speaking evenly: "The pilot mission. You know the Builders' Directives. You know the necessity. We can't take down the whole colony to be destroyed by something not discoverable from orbit. We haven't the means to break out of gravity and come back. Directives recommend the mission consist of two men and two women. Partly to avoid trusting the judgment of one volunteer. Partly because one sex might be immune to a lethal factor that would kill the other. Partly on the chance that the four might pull through with their survival equipment, and multiply, even if they had to tell the rest of us to stay away. So I want four guinea-pigs. Whoever they are, they'll be four individuals whom we love and can't spare. I am now calling for them."

This was the way it came, like all great questions, not with trumpets but plainly spoken and quiet as morning. I thought at first there was also a question in Miranda's brown-eyed gaze, one not weighted toward yes or no. Then I understood she was not asking me: *Are you going to stand up?* She was silently saying: *I must do this, I'm driven from within. Whether you stand up or not, Davy, I must and I will.*

I took her hand again and I was on my feet.

Five or six other couples were standing, and a surprising number, ten or a dozen, stood up alone. I heard a murmuring, voices here and there attempting the unsayable, as Rupert Madison looked us over through his captain's mask.

I supposed he would choose the volunteers from among the Randies. Breezy Arthur Clay for instance, standing alone two rows ahead of us, solemn as I had never seen him. Or Joe and Miriam Somers, solidly married with the formalities Miranda had never quite wanted for us, decent, unexciting Joe and Miriam who rather

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thought they'd like to be farmers if we ever landed. Or Laurette Vieuxtemps, a housewife temperament but not committed to any man, religious, reservedly sweet.

Madison told a few of them—all specialists—to sit down. Then he appeared to have reached a private impasse, brooding in his loneliness. Fussy and dapper Cecil Dorman, on the platform with him, leaned forward suggesting something, and shriveled in Madison's glare. Madison would not be saying again, in words, where responsibility lay, but the Psychometric Coordinator was just the one guy who wouldn't understand it unless he got his nose rubbed in it twice. Madison sighed and spoke names.

Just names. No request to sit down.

"Paul Cutter." I was unready to understand. I had not noticed till then that Paul Cutter had risen; his squat form had been hidden by Art Clay. "Laurette Vieuxtemps . . ." Miranda's fingers gripped tightly. I did understand. "Miranda Klein . . . David Leroy."

II

David Leroy, pilot. I had a title . . .

I don't recall much about the entry into atmosphere. I remember a tight-sealed pocket of heat skimming interminably above a world that gradually expanded in the viewplates above my controls. I remember fear, doubt of my own skill based on nothing but years of theoretical drill without experience. Most clearly, I recall Captain Madison's voice, linked to me by the tenuous nerve of radio, a true part of me, the one part that remained unshaken.

I had known there would be breaks in communication—static interference, other difficulties—and there was one when Madison was on the other side of the planet. No foreknowledge can prepare you for such a loneliness. Yet I'd always been lonely, like Miranda, like everyone else, a single human planet in the galaxy of the human race.

Then Madison, remote and *above*, in an orbit become incredibly *swift* relative to my *slow*, was speaking again. I was able to give him a much lower temperature reading, a respectably diminished altitude. He said: "You're past the worst. How do you feel?"

"Fine, dandy and lonesome." I glanced in the mirror that gave me the cabin. "Others in good shape. Colonizing with no pain."

"You'll be over that plateau in six minutes, then test your power. Better not use it much till you're down to say 90,000—but that's up to you, Davy. From here on you play it by the seat of your pants."

"I'll do that, Captain."

"We won't try calling from the

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blind side again. Reestablish contact 0940 hours *Galileo* time." Then with some dry noise that might have been static: "See you, boy."

Below me, ocean and red-green land, an infinity of brooding day. I found the 40-mile oval of my target, and tested the power in a long cautious turn—no trouble. Trust the Builders for that.

The Builders? There was no one, no one at all to trust except Miranda Klein, Laurette Vieuxtemps, Paul Cutter and myself. The Builders were finished with us, had done their magnificent best fifteen years ago, and by now many of them would be dead, and, groping somewhere through the unthinkable reaches, there might be a *Galileo II*, even a *Galileo III*. I would not think now about the Builders, who had known they could have no reward except consciousness of a piece of good work completed . . .

Our chosen landing spot was a roughly oval plateau, 40 miles at the greatest length, on one of the three continents of the southern hemisphere. It had been selected by the Council of *Galileo*—del Sentiero presiding, we four volunteers awkwardly attending. The choice had to be partly arbitrary, for the photographic map showed little to suggest that any one spot in the temperate belts would be better than another. I favored the notion of an island, but kept my Randy mouth shut. Del Sentiero suggested the same thing and was overruled: aircraft fuel would give out before our technology could replace it, the building of ships might be difficult, we might even find no suitable timber. And a plateau is, in a way, an island.

My turn carried us out over the sea, then inland, miles above the white summits of a mountain range that rose to the west of our plateau. I cut the power and we drifted soundless in the thickening air.

The plateau lay 30 miles in from the sea. Vegetation covered most of it, but reddish-white patches suggested open ground, possibly sand. We had noticed the same pinkish tinge on many of the ocean beaches. Easy for landing (I hoped) and an easy mark for *Galileo* to hold in observation. Westward for 500 miles spread the random masses of the mountains, our plateau a midget among their numberless foothills.

Prevailing winds in the southern hemisphere blew westward as on Earth; Dr. Bunuan was surely right in assuming plentiful rainfall on the seaward slopes. The region west of the range was no desert, however, but deep forest, 800 miles of it, divided by the silver furrow of a river flowing south. That forest ended at another, narrower range, following the continent's western shore. Our plateau stood at the 45th parallel south,

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where the continent dwindled in a triangular pattern rather like South America. No land bridge to the continent in the northern hemisphere, and no continental mass at the south polar region, but a myriad scattered islands, and drift ice, and occasional stretches of blue sea all the way to the pole.

"Handling right?" I had known Paul Cutter would be the first and only one to forget Madison's order about letting me alone on this job. I didn't mind the distraction; the little ship was gliding with almost no need of attention. I did mind the jitters in Paul's crashing voice.

I said: "Yes. You people happy back there?"

"Happy as three ticks on a dog —you're the dog." The voice I wanted, Miranda's. It went on, cool but not too sharp: "Let's keep a cork in it, Paul—the man's busy."

Wounded to the core, Paul boomed: "Sorry! Sorry!"

Two birds, or creatures in the shape of birds, were circling between me and the plateau, as a hawk soars, with unmoving wings. Frightened perhaps by our descending gleam, they sped away downwind—at least I thought, from the gust of speed without wing-motion, that they were heading downwind, and I tried to remember the games of seagulls over Martha's Vineyard. Only the color returned to me and the sense of an airy freedom, the taste of salt wind, the brown ghost of a Portuguese boy who used to play with me.

The smooth course of the ship told me nothing—maybe no wind at all was blowing. Maybe it was blowing some other way at a lower altitude. I saw no wind-motion of the forest, but I was still too high to be certain.

And too low to look down any longer on the mountain-tops. They were above me and would remain above me.

The spot of open ground I had selected for landing was the only one beginning at an edge of the plateau. If the wind was right—where *was* the wind?—I would circle out beyond the edge, come in slightly above it, and still have two miles clear for a landing. With this trim vessel, Madison said, I could manage with less than a thousand yards. But where was the wind?

The time to swing out beyond the plateau was now, right now. The plane made the turn in graceful ease—and dropped, hideously.

I think I yelled it was just an air pocket. But when I lurched out of it we were bound straight for the sullen wall of the plateau. In panic I somehow slammed the power on in time, and ran scared up a channel of hell like a dragonfly on fire. We cleared the cliff by a yard and shot a thousand feet up before I had the wits to level off and cut the jets. Paul was howling: "God Almighty, you almost—"

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Miranda's voice came small and cold: "Have a tranquillizer, Paul, it's on the house. Have you noticed, by the way, we're all right?"

I began talking myself, though, when I realized I'd forgotten to lower the landing gear. The talk did me good. I got the gear down. I soared out further beyond the plateau, came in higher, ready for the air pocket, hitting it again and coming out happy, skittering over half a mile of reddish white and touching down in a landing soft as a baby's kiss. Miranda said: "Davy, when you get around to it, explain me some of those nouns and adjectives, huh? I thought I knew em all."

We equalized the pressure, a difference too small to bother the eardrums, and breathed the unknown atmosphere—nothing to gain by delaying. It was wild, warm, the freshness wholly sweet. I could have sat there half an hour doing nothing but breathe the air of Demeter—and wondering whether in a few weeks we would be voting on that name, a poetic whim of Andrea del Sentiero.

The stuff outside was mostly sand, sparse red grains mingled with the white. Miranda whispered: "Be first to set your foot on it." It seemed unimportant, a thing I might do to please her—until I had done it. Then absurd pride startled me, and I held up my arms for her.

Laurette and Paul emerged, Laurette moving away from us, looking toward the mountains in the west—praying I think, or merely wanting a small time of solitude. She had talked with the chaplain during most of our last hour on *Galileo*. Miranda and I had spent that time with the half dozen friends who had been closest to us through the voyage—not saying goodbye; they all wanted to take it for granted they would rejoin us in four weeks. Paul Cutter had employed the hour furiously writing in a corner of the common room—some intense document which he delivered into Madison's keeping. "Not to be opened," he blared for all of us to hear, "except in the event that *Galileo* must proceed without us." Captain Madison took it gravely, probably with no smothered impulse to laugh, and shook hands with the hero.

Impossible that I could ever have looked down on those mountain peaks. Yet I had done so. I would remember it.

Miranda kicked off her right shoe, pressed her bare foot in the reddish sand, drew it away, gazed curiously at the dainty human imprint. I asked: "Are you caring now?"

She held my shoulder, putting back the shoe; watched me a while with midnight eyes; said: "I think I am . . . Let's walk off a way."

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We approached the somber edge of the woods. "You'd know it," I said, "wouldn't you, dear? You wouldn't just think."

"Maybe." She was frowning gravely at the sand, not wanting to touch me or be touched. "You've felt it yourself, Davy, that emptiness. Impulse to give up because nothing can make much difference."

"Sometimes. I found I could push it away by studying something new—holing up in the library—talking to del Sentiero."

"I couldn't. Not the last year anyway. It was partly the ship, the monotony. Suspended animation." She looked about rather blindly into the depth of morning. "We're—home, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"It wasn't only the ship. I kept thinking, even if we can have a baby, there'll be—ah, what do the damn Directives call it?—70 per cent chance of normal birth. I remember hearing my father say that even the 70 per cent was a sort of statistician's lie. The dice are loaded, Davy. . . . I loved Earth. You did too. I know. Inside me somewhere I've got every word you ever said about Martha's Vineyard. . . . Davy, it's just barely possible I'm pregnant. I can't be sure, hasn't been time, quite." She wanted nearness then, twisting her fingers in my shirt, clinging, suddenly crying. "Let it be true, Davy! Let it be right, not a—not a 30-per-center. I'd care—I'd care *then!*"

It meant nothing to Paul Cutter that she was crying in my arms. I felt his tap on my shoulder, his brazen voice exploding: "Who is leader?"

Miranda laughed; looked past me at the little man and laughed, with brimming eyes—which puzzled the hell out of him. Simply Paul's way. He was incapable of understanding other people's urgencies.

I straightened my face, suggesting that for the moment we hardly needed leadership: we all knew what work was to be done, maybe we'd already done the biggest part by breathing the air and continuing to live. I looked at my watch. "*Galileo* will be calling in fifteen minutes. Until then why don't we just look around? Only we'd better break out some armament, I suppose."

I should have thought of that sooner, too. The bland quiet here made the idea of guns downright obscene. Nothing was stirring. Two bird-like things soared high overhead, maybe curious at the alien brightness of our plane. The lack of vegetation at this landing spot puzzled me. In places the ground was clay instead of sand; small stones resembling the granites and composites of Earth lay here and there. Nothing suggested animal life. In a spot higher than the rest of the open land, I

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noticed a boulder thrusting from the ground and a wraith of vapor rising from it to dissolve in the still air. A geyser, perhaps, that periodically flooded the area, killing plant life. The trees, and the rim of very dark grass between them and the open ground, looked rich and healthy.

The trees were in the pattern of Earth, but I saw no such complex of a thousand species as in forests of the old world. One type was completely dominant, a broad-leaf tree averaging fifty feet in height, thick-trunked, spreading only at the top, the young leaves and twigs red as maple buds, the mature leaves a hemlock green with wide red veining. The grass was like Earth's except for its darkness, shading almost to a cobalt blue; it grew hardly a foot high, dense as carpet-pile. We had seen that color solid in most of the open areas of the plateau, and it was the characteristic hue of the savannahs elsewhere on the planet.

We opened a storage compartment of the plane. Paul and I slung light carbines; Miranda strapped on a .32 automatic. The bullets for all three were designed to fragment on impact, releasing an anesthetic poison that would stop anything if the wound failed to—anything with an Earth-type bloodstream. Laurette Vieuxtemps, when I called her, smiled and shook her head.

"Will you stand by the radio then, Laurette, till they call in?"

"Yes." She was good with instruments, deft and careful; delicate tests on soil and plants would be part of her work. She returned to the plane, after a last glance at the hills, their red-green mystery, cloud-trailing spires brilliant with snow.

I said: "I don't like carrying this thing either, Laurette. But just at first I don't want any of us wandering out here unarmed."

Laurette nodded amiably. And Paul Cutter said with some clang of bitterness: "Well, Dave, you've answered my question."

"I'm not leader unless you all three agree to it."

I think I spoke with friendliness. I meant to; we had need of it. His face, turned toward me in the mild heat of the sun of Demeter, had gone opaque. Miranda's arm slid around me; she studied the ground, perhaps waiting. Paul said politely, with none of his normal stridency: "Four weeks, they said. I agree you should be leader, for four weeks."

III

At the close of the second day we imagined we knew a little about that plateau. I had hedgehopped over it twice, beginning to enjoy the plane, except for the always rugged instant of landing. I flew alone both times—no

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sense risking two lives with an inexperienced pilot. In the first one I proved that the only part of the plateau safe for the larger landing ships of *Galileo* was the one I had first chosen. Then I indulged myself in a 30-mile flight to the sea above the course of a small river that skirted the northern base of the plateau and wound down through the piedmont past rolling land, meadow and forest, meeting the ocean at a harbor a mile wide. Madison wanted to know more about that harbor.

A small hilly island stood twenty miles out to sea from it, hazy and purple in the sun. It pulled me, called me. I was thinking, I know, of Martha's Vineyard. I thought also of fuel, danger, the need of my people for this plane and for me too; and I did not go.

On my flight to the harbor I noticed a few tawny deerlike animals bounding into the woods away from the shadow of the plane, and some flying creatures, none very close. On the way back something different showed itself, night-black, lizard-shaped, basking in a sunny meadow. I circled down for a better look. Hugely unconcerned, it did not retreat when I skimmed over it sixty feet up. Not dead, for I saw the great triangle of the head moving, and a twitch of a saurian tail. I shot up then; the sudden clamor of the jets did not disturb it. I guessed the length at twenty-five feet.

We slept in the plane on the first night. My second flight, next day, was for study of a smaller open area two miles from our landing site, that looked reasonable for a camp. It was a clearing of level dark grass half a mile square with a brook slipping across the northern side, widening to a pond near the edge of the woods. I landed and explored.

The pond-water shone deep ruby, reflecting red-leaved bushes. I found the banks pockmarked with prints of small divided hoofs, and noticed one set of tracks with pads and claw-marks, not frighteningly large. Mammals or something like them lived in this land, knew fear, ate each other, bred, died. I remembered my black lizard, his vastness curved rather like a question-mark.

The forms would be new to me. The forms themselves would change, must already have done so through millions of years in the manner of Earth. So far as I knew, so far as I know today, the meaning, if there was one, would be the same.

I was bothered by the absence of anything like humanly edible plants. Maybe the forest would take care of that. Here I found only the short grass and a few of the red-leaved bushes that grew by the pond. I brought a shovel from the plane and drove it into the sod. The loosened earth displayed brown worms, legless

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grubs, nothing like ants or beetles. In any such region on Earth I would have encountered a hundred forms of insect life. Grasshoppers would have shot up around my feet; bees and flies would have buzzed near me; beetles would have scampered away from the shovel. The grassblades should have been scarred by the nibbling of tiny mouths; butterflies ought to have been drifting and fluttering in innocent splendor.

No bugs. I supposed I could do without them . . .

The earth under the grass was dark, rich-looking, with a pleasing aromatic smell. We must learn what it could do. I collected a sample of pond water for testing and returned to the others. That was near noon of the second day.

By evening we had moved to that clearing and set up our camp around a light dome shelter—astonishingly large, strong against storms, capable of lasting indefinitely under any conditions the Builders could imagine for a planet that was bound to be much like their own.

We set out a wire-covered pen for a pair of rabbits, potential food. Those, and a few mice and rats for experiment, were the only animals that shared the pilot mission. From *Galileo* would come sheep, chickens, a few precious cattle of a recently developed breed hardly bigger than goats. Other animals would arrive (if anything arrived to join us) in the form of frozen ova and sperm that our skill might or might not be able to bring to maturity—still a rudimentary art when we left Earth.

These outside bunnies were pilot bunnies. Our three other pairs must get along on *Galileo* rations until we were sure the first pair was thriving. Laurette set up her miniature laboratory for soil and water tests. Paul Cutter dug magnificently until the light began to fail. I felt now a kind of permanency and sense of achievement, and Miranda felt it too, working like a little dynamo at whatever came to hand.

Toward sundown I roved the whole clearing again, with the carbine, not wanting it until I noticed the sun of Demeter slipping beyond the mountains, then pleased enough to be carrying that slim bit of functional wickedness. Once or twice I heard small life scuttering away in the grass, but if Demeter was blessed with field mice I didn't see them. We had set our camp not too near the pond; we wanted the wild things to continue using it if they would. As I approached it now, I thought I glimpsed some of those "deer" slipping into the shadows. Later we must shoot a few, for science if not for food. I felt no fear, only pleasure and curiosity, when a night flier, like a bat or bird, hur-

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ried over me and flickered into evening light above the trees. . . .

And before dawn on the third day, Miranda was ill.

She woke me before sunrise, during Paul's tour of guard duty. I could barely see her face. She was speaking soberly, carefully, as if describing someone else's trouble—pain in the right leg, in the right foot a numbness that had started as an itching, and now the beginning of fever, headache, nausea.

Under the light of my lantern, the sole of her right foot looked inflamed, but at that time I found no break in the skin; the leg was reddened up to the knee. She said she was afraid of blacking out, and her voice was blurring—but it was Miranda who had the wits to remember how she had made that barefoot imprint on the sand of our landing place.

By mid-morning, near the time of our next radio contact with *Galileo*, she was unconscious. No signs of pain or delirium. She was unreachable, breathing too rapidly in a fevered sleep.

We had given her MH-12, for lack of anything better, and because it's the most generally useful and safe of the antibiotics developed on Earth. Then Laurette had searched the medical information in our "library"—*Galileo's* great microfilm library cut to the essentials. We could expect no precise help there, since the diseases of Earth would not be paralleled closely enough for proper guidance, but what Laurette found concerning Earth's tropical fevers did give me the idea of searching Miranda's foot with a hand-lens. I discovered a puncture so small that without the lens I had missed it completely. It seemed to be a true eschar with a definite center. It could have been made by an infinitesimal wood or mineral sliver, admitting some poison latent in the ground, or it could have been the bite of an organism hidden under the sand or too tiny to see. For what it was worth, and so far as I could endure it, I might then consider the scrub typhus that was endemic in some regions of Earth's tropics, a rickettsial disease carried by a mite no bigger than a grain of pepper.

I remembered my black lizard in the meadow. I would take him on any time in preference to this. No man is born with any skill at fighting shadows. You have to learn it, and always the hard way.

I could not look at the implications. I could only stand by and wait for Miranda to come back to me; to bring back, if it might be so, the meaning and the purpose I knew I was losing. It was not a case of thinking how I loved her: that was deep-down, bloodstream knowledge requiring no thought, and to think of it then would have

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made me even more useless in trying to help her.

I was with her—needing to fight, and no antagonist; needing to talk with her, and she could not know it—when I heard the noise of Paul Cutter, subdued because it came from within the plane. Laurette had just rejoined me by Miranda's cot in the shelter; Paul would be talking to *Galileo*, and a black uneasiness vaguely telepathic nudged me to rise. "Stay with her, Laurette," I said, and hurried for the plane.

I saw him at the radio, the prominent, somehow pathetic cords at the back of his neck, his heavy head wobbling a little, his voice attempting a casualness denied by that tremor and by his sweating hands. He was saying: "Yes, the rabbits go for the grass and they're thriving. What? . . . Oh sure, everyone's fine. We—"

He jumped a foot when my fingers dug at his shoulder. I nodded at the transmitter, and he croaked: "Here's Leroy—wants to talk to you." He lurched away, but an animal warning of danger reached me—perhaps he made some half-completed motion. I drew the automatic I was carrying and held it aimed at his heart while I talked to the Captain.

Paul slumped to his haunches and dropped his face on his knees. I told Madison as quickly as I could about Miranda, and he said: "I'll switch you to Dr. Dana, he's right here—then I want to talk to you again, Dave."

Dr. Dana helped me—just the voice and the manner. I could imagine I was in touch with the three thousand years of his tradition; out of space, that was Hippocrates talking. He questioned me, approving what we had done, suggesting other supportive measures. He admitted no other important measures were possible, since we knew nothing of the disease, hence nothing of the prognosis. He agreed it might be similar in some ways to Earth's tropical fevers, though when I mentioned scrub typhus he roared at me to forget that. But then he mentioned methods of searching the dead sand area for a guilty organism if there was one, and warned against letting Demeter's earth come in contact with our skins; so he would be reviewing his knowledge of the rickettsial diseases, and the snarling statistics of mortality. Well, Paul and I in our digging had both shoved our hands in the dirt several times. It flickered through my mind that Paul himself might be ill. He was sick enough, avoiding the cold eye of the .32, but not with fever.

Madison was back. "Dave, why did Paul say everyone was fine?"

"Oh—didn't realize the seriousness. It's all new this morning, Captain. Laurette and I have been caring for her, while Paul was getting on with the work."

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I suppose Madison knew I was lying, and knew Paul Cutter had to be my problem. Paul flashed me a sick and haunted thank-you-for-nothing glare. I gave Madison the rest of the report—water pure, test animals in good shape, no time yet for much aerial reconnaissance outside the plateau. At the close Madison said: "Dave, if you possibly can, be on hand yourself when we're due to call in."

"I'll do that, Captain."

"Soon as Miranda wakes up, give her my love. See you, Davy."

I closed the transmitter; studied the man suffering beyond the gunsights, and holstered the automatic. "Why, Paul?"

He was on his feet and swaying. "Why don't you shoot?"

"No cause, now. You were ready to jump me till I made the report. That was in your face . . . Why?"

"I'm ashamed," he said. "Is that enough?"

"Look: you knew I'd be reporting next time, if not now."

The tremor of his head ceased, his mouth steadied to tightness. A man of twenty-five, he looked forty. "Maybe I thought by that time you'd—understand."

"Or maybe you only saw them leaving, abandoning us, and didn't think."

"Have it your way."

"Paul, while there's any chance at all, they'll never abandon us."

"You're wrong there." He knotted his hands, white-knuckled. "They'll go. Dr. Carey will influence them. Dr. God-Almighty Carey will see to that if no one else does." I scolded myself for failing to recognize the paranoid pattern sooner; or maybe I was wrong now, and seeing spooks. I made a note that I must talk to Carey at the next contact. "Dave—I've said, I'm ashamed. I was afraid and foolish, and I admit it. Isn't that enough?"

"I suppose it is." It was true—he was sick with shame, and other inward disasters; but did shame fit the pattern? I thought, the hell with patterns—the poor devil was human; leave it at that. Of course he was also profoundly hating me. Because I had seen him in an act of dishonesty and betrayal, he would always hate me. I said: "Let's get on with the work."

He stumbled out of the cabin and resumed digging away sod for our test plot in open ground. Attacking it rather—driving the bright blade into the green face of an enemy.

Late in the morning of our fourth day on Demeter, Miranda recovered consciousness. Her fever had risen to a peak of 106° during an interminable night, when the green-white moon of Demeter was to me no longer enchanting, only sickly and baleful. Then, about dawn, the fever rapidly subsided. Miranda came back to me. I could forget about scrub typhus. I could sweep away

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all the horrors, because I saw memory and understanding and awareness of my kiss.

"How long, Davy? What's the time?"

"You've been out for one day of twenty-six hours. The computer upstairs has dreamed up a calendar for us—got it yesterday. This is Friday morning—sorry fresh out of fish."

"They know of course?"

"Yes, and since you're recovering it won't make any difference."

"So what's the man crying about?"

"Stardust up my nose—itches. How about your foot—does that itch now?"

"Little bit. No numbness. Feels about all right." Under the lens, the puncture spot looked healed, like any tiny injury.

"You got a bite. I'm going after the beast soon as you're up and around—earth samples, and so on. We'll run down the little devil." She couldn't smile much, but she was trying. "He won't stop anything."

"That's right, Bud—we'll rise above bugs and stuff." She was trying, but then her eyes dilated, she winced and turned her face away from me. "Ask Laurette to come, will you please?"

"Yes—what is it?"

"Oh, damn everything!"

"What is it, Miranda?"

"Don't you know?" I suppose I did. "My baby—it was going to be my—my—Demeter's killed my baby."

IV

Saturday morning Miranda was able to sit up without help, and eat. She said she felt nothing wrong except exhaustion. She blamed that on the gravity of Demeter, but I think it was the after-effect of fever; we other three had adjusted to the gravity with almost no effort. Then after a decent meal, an hour of her old love Sibelius on the tapes, and another hour of just sitting with me in the temperate sunlight, Miranda let me talk to her, and suggest that she had not been pregnant at all. Rejecting the idea at first in despair, she presently came around to accepting it, and I felt she was at least half convinced that Demeter had nothing to do with our disappointment. Just before she fell asleep beside me in the sunshine, she murmured: "False-alarm Miranda. From here on out I'm going to try to behave like a rational mammal. But it's uphill work—you know? . . ."

Sunday morning Miranda climbed into the cabin of the plane, wanting to do it without the help of my arm, and talked to Captain Madison and Dr. Dana, rejoining me with a new quiet resembling cheerfulness.

Paul Cutter was speaking to me only when necessary, and with an

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intense politeness that affected me like a split fingernail. He made a point of asking, in private, for "official" permission to carry his carbine. There was no danger in him for the present. My leadership had become an immediate fact; I knew Paul felt terror at the thought of having to assume responsibility if anything happened to me. Actually he wouldn't have had to: Laurette would have stood aloof while Miranda assumed it, and Caliban-as-hero would have minded the chores.

When Miranda promised to loaf and rest, I took off that Sunday morning to blaze a trail alone through the woods to the dead-sand area. Miranda's recovery and her new calm had brought the kind of joy where recklessness bubbles near the surface. It had brought me too a burgeoning love for this one planet among all the stars. In such a mood the foot can slip—mine didn't. I went slowly, mindful of my blazes on the wood of these ancient trees.

The forest was all one hush, cool under the thickness of the canopy. I walked on a carpet formed from the rotted wood and leaves of centuries. Almost no undergrowth. At one place, a tree had fallen from old age; here a hundred saplings of the same species had already shot up high at the touch of the sun. Therefore they grew from seed; therefore the trees ought to bear *some* kind of fruit in their season, whenever that was.

Rarely and far apart, I noticed trees with holes high off the ground—natural holes left by the fall of dead branches and rotting of the sapwood. They were occupied. The corner of my eye caught a squirrely character popping into one of them, and I was aware of the scrutiny of harmless eyes.

After the first mile my ears told me of something larger following. I tried quick turns but learned nothing—once, maybe, a hint of motion retiring behind the reddish column of a tree-trunk. Anyhow not a twenty-five-foot lizard.

I was humming for a while—Schubert's *Die Forelle* I think it was, or some other memory of Earth equally light and happy.

Observing Dr. Dana's instructions, I was covered except for my face, and I took care not to let that be brushed by branches, though I was fairly sure the enemy I hunted lived under the sand. Close-fitting leggings, shirt tucked in, gloves. I carried a shovel, carbine, hand-ax, a sack with several small bags that could be tightly sealed, and a cage with four white mice.

Not much of a load. I supposed I could drop everything but the carbine, fast, but though I caught a few more dim sounds, nothing bothered me. If whatever followed me possessed anything like

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my kind of wits, it would know I was aware of its presence.

I came out on the dead sand near that vapor column idly rising from the fissured rock. The vapor gave off a slight sulfur smell. It drifted up with no pulsation, no force. Some age-old dirty business in the gut of Demeter, a planet that never asked for us. Yet I loved her.

Apologetically I set the wire-bottom cage of mice out on a patch of sand, with a cloth to shade them from the sun. Poor little rascals, as martyrs to science they even had their bellies shaved, to make it easier for our enemy to bite them—if it would, if there was such an enemy. I filled the small bags with samples of the sand, the clay patches, the good-seeming earth near the woods, the sod, the forest mold itself. One bag still empty, I searched for Miranda's barefoot print. It had been blurred by a breeze that must have stirred the sand at the edges without obliterating it. No rain had fallen since we landed. Nothing had made tracks out on this desolate ground. The ruts of our plane, our shoe-prints, patches where the jets had blasted sand hollows in take-off—all still plain to read.

For reasons of sentiment or superstition I took my final sample from a spot as near Miranda's footprint as I could set the shovel without destroying the mark—bad science, no excuse offered.

Nothing had followed me out here. If anything watched from the edge of the woods I caught no sense of it.

I had been away from the unfortunate mice for twenty minutes. As I removed the cloth they looked fair enough, but when I raised the cage a midget drop of blood splashed on the sand. I held the cage above the level of my eyes. Two of the mice flitted about in natural nervousness. The others were sluggish, and on the shaved belly of one of them I saw another blood-drop form and fall. No sign of normal coagulation.

I spread the cloth, drove in the shovel where the cage had rested, and spilled out the sand with care. That's where I found the thing, a worm two inches long gorged with blood. With a gloved fingertip I stirred the sand and found another, not distended, thin as a fine hair and barely visible, the same pinkish-white color as the sand. Exposed, the things moved feebly, obscene head ends lifting and blindly searching, mouth parts apparent as specks of black.

I drew the cloth into the form of a bag, tied it tightly for my collection and started home.

On the way back through the woods I tried to puzzle it out. If nothing ventured on that sand, where did the worms find their natural food supply? Subterranean maybe—burrowing animals, grubs,

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other worms. I could leave all that to Dr. Bunuan, but it teased my curiosity, reminding me how mystery is always with us. I could not live long enough to see our colony (if there was to be a colony) become more than a trifling spot of intrusion on a most ancient planet. If we had grandchildren to the seventh generation, this world would remain imperfectly explored—and yet some of them would certainly hunger for space flight.

We never really learned much about the beautiful planet Earth.

Twice I stopped to search the forest mold for more of the hair-worms. I found none, but did find more of the stocky brown worms than in the sod of our clearing. They were active, burrowing, wriggling, hunting. I saw one attack a grub. Grasping organs shot out from either side of the worm's head and squeezed the grub helpless while the mouth consumed it. Maybe these brown fellows ate the poison hair-worms.

I glanced up from the vanishing grub, and saw what was lying flat along a branch that overhung my trail.

That clawed track by the pond had deceived me about the size of its maker. The paws were disproportionately large, the animal itself lean as an ocelot, not much bigger. The claws, hooked for efficient climbing and piercing, were relatively immense, partly retractile, though less so than a cat's. The creature was hairless, with a reddish-brown skin obscure against the color of the branch. I saw a narrow-nosed head, like a fox's except that the external ears were mere flaps of skin close to the skull. It had the wonderful deep eyes of a beast that must be mainly nocturnal.

I could bypass that part of the trail and circle around. I said aloud: "Would that sit all right with you, Jackson?"

Jackson winced at the sound of my voice—he shouldn't have, after hearing my no-account baritone murder *Die Forelle*—and flattened himself, or herself, close to the branch. I took up the carbine, seeing the narrow head begin a measuring motion from side to side. The hind-quarters quivered, the motion of the head ceased in a frozen readiness. Not happy about that, I said: "Look, I'm not a deer. I'm not even a darling."

After all, I suppose Jackson could hardly have forgiven that. He was fifteen feet above the ground, six yards from the muzzle of the carbine. He could jump it with no strain and evidently had it in mind. The mouth opened and closed on interesting daggers of orange teeth. My sights steadied on the thin neck. I said: "Sorry, Jackson!" and fired.

Beginner's luck. Jackson shuddered, dropped and lay twitching,

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orange-red blood gushing from the shattered neck. I turned the body over with my foot. Not ugly nor beautiful, just strange. The sex organs puzzled me—female I thought, but peculiar. I tied the body to my sack, finding it curiously light. We learned later that the bones are partly hollow, and most of the viscera lighter than the corresponding tissues of Earth animals.

Dissection and observation in the next few days also demonstrated that Jackson, the timid and stupid creatures resembling deer, and the mouse-like animals nesting in the grass, are mammals, in the sense that they bear their young alive and nurse them. And they are functional hermaphrodites. Demeter hasn't arranged for boy to meet girl. Well, we're here to fix that.

The brains, even to my uneducated eye, look primitively smooth.

Maybe we can fix that too . . .

We found poison hair-worms in all the samples of sand and clay from the open ground, none at all in the sod or forest mold. The two lively mice from my cage remained lively—not bitten, apparently. Of the other two, one went into stupor the following day, and died. The one that had been bleeding did not die. Its wound clotted normally soon after my return to camp, and after a period of sluggishness the mouse recovered with no observable after-effects.

We repeated the experiment with other mice—couldn't spare many—and hair-worms from my samples. The results were the same. Under Laurette's guidance, Miranda gladly introduced a brown worm to a hair-worm, with delightful results. In sixty seconds, no hair-worm, the brown guy acting as contented as I do after a mince pie.

Conclusion, given me over the radio by Dr. Bunuan: "You've got a lovely little thing there, boy. Apparently the poison is, or is associated with, an anti-coagulant that probably helps the worm to feed. If the bite is interrupted, likely the poison stays in the wound, enters the bloodstream, generates some kind of systemic toxin. But if your trichinoid critter finishes the drink, I suggest he sucks back most of the poison with the blood and everybody's happy. And let me say, Davy, you people have put through a handsome little preliminary study." O my Miranda, burning that night with a fever of 106° and far away! But there was a sweet healthiness in the biologist's way of speaking; he had not forgotten the pain and terror any more than I had. I reserve judgment on physicists, but I'll drink beer with a biologist any day of the week—if we can make beer on Demeter. "Very handsome, Davy. I wish I was there."

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I transmitted his remarks to Paul Cutter. Paul was alone in the clearing outside the shelter, with nothing much to do. We had dug as large a test plot as we needed, the seeds from Earth had been planted—in fact it was almost time for the radishes, rye-grass and other quick-sprouting plants to show themselves if they were going to. I passed on Dr. Bunuan's comment mostly for something pleasant to say. Paul had shown a polite interest in our study of the worms, saying that he had no talent himself for technician's work.

Paul faced me gravely, listened with bent head to my recital of Dr. Bunuan's words, nodded amiably, and replied: "The fundamental error is in the very first clause—as I tried so many times to make plain. If the colony is to be defined as a *republic,* in that opening clause, you bypass and throw away the entire experience of the 19th and 20th Centuries of Earth history, which is absurd. May I remind you that at the time of the founding of the United States of America, the word 'democracy' was a *bad* word, a term of *opprobrium?*" He smacked his fist into his palm; the tawny grazers could have heard his voice and quivered to the vibration half a mile away in the woods. "Now manifestly I am no Marxian. The Russian experiment, for all its important achievements, was ethically and politically a dead end. And why? Because dictatorship supervened. Because in Russia the essence of social democracy was never in effect, once more the cause of the common man was *lost.* Now in the very first amendment I proposed, or I should say *tried* to propose—"

I heard him out . . .

V

Rain fell heavily all through our sixteenth day on Demeter; warm rain without a wind; we huddled miserably in the shelter. Laurette put in the time mending some of our clothes. Paul read, glued to the scanner—politics I guess, or psychology. Miranda played chess with me, and listened to Sibelius.

Our seeds from Earth had rotted. The day before we had dug up a few—squash, corn, garden pea, bean seeds, all sodden pulp without life. But here and there a wheat kernel showed a feeble sprout. Even the busy grubs in Demeter's earth had not wanted them.

Of course, one can get along on a carnivorous diet. If our rabbits could flourish on Demeter's grass, probably the sheep and cattle from *Galileo* could do the same. I had shot two of the deer-like animals. We tried the meat on the white rats and then ate of it without harm—muttony and rank, but not impossible.

The rain stopped after sunrise

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of the seventeenth day. I took off for a wider reconnaissance. Captain Madison had suggested this after learning of the failure of our seeds. Somewhere in the meadows or hills there ought to be edible plants worth a try. Captain Madison had also made it plain that nothing so far reported had discouraged him; his intention was to bring the whole colony down at the end of our four weeks. "Keep in your calculations, Davy, that we'll bring machines and three hundred pairs of hands."

It didn't sound like talk for my morale. And I wondered, I think for the first time, what the mere fact of the pilot mission might be doing to those who remained on the ship. . . .

I left the plateau behind me and flew north, a broadening morning on my right hand. The world glittered from the rain, the forest a field of diamonds. At five thousand feet, I saw that island twenty miles out from the river mouth shining like dawn made tangible.

Del Sentiero's suggestion of an island for the colony had been overruled; but shouldn't I at least go and look? Wasn't I playing it by the seat of my pants, accepted leader of the pilot mission?

Accepted anyway by Miranda and partly by Laurette Vieuxtemps. Paul Cutter was still at his brittle play-acting, ludicrously deferring to me, contriving each time to drop a hint that my "glory" would end. He seemed unworried about a bloody nose—may have craved one.

With Laurette, the question of leadership hardly arose, for she was sensible, hard-working; given another year on *Galileo* she would have earned a title. There hadn't been more than two or three occasions when it was up to me to tell her what to do, and those unimportant. She was inevitably remote from us in her religious faith, which answered a need in her mind not present in my own. Unlike our kind, perpetually worried chaplain, Laurette paid Miranda and me the rare courtesy of not trying to change our agnosticism. She may have been privately sorry for us, but we were spared hearing about it. We were friends; we got along in the limited area of mental contact.

Again I did not go to look at my island. Perhaps I was afraid that its summoning beauty was an effect of haze, distance, memory and irrelevant dreams . . . Some of the time as I flew north I was reliving a moment of the day before, when Miranda grinned at me across the shambles of the chessboard and said: "The things that happen when your knights break loose are pitiful, that's all. I find myself caring deeply about that butchered pawn, Captain Leroy." Caring—she wasn't talking about chess. She proved that in the

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night, when the rain tapped on the roof of our shelter, and she was whispering we'd try again, maybe our child would be the first to be conceived on the planet Demeter. . . .

The seaward slopes of the foothills had changed color after the rain. From an even, reddish green they had become a riot of tomato-scarlet splashes. I supposed—and I was wrong—that the downpour must have brought some plant into sudden blossoming.

I skimmed past the hills searching for a level place to land. Not so easy; the terrain was nearly all sloping, vegetation thick. The radio was with me: I had thought it safer to leave it installed in the plane, on the chance we might have to take off from the plateau in a hurry. Now I could picture myself abandoning a wrecked plane and the only means of communicating with *Galileo*. I could observe a lost human fool groping back twenty-odd miles through unknown forest, no armament except the .32 at my hip, no assurance that I could scale the walls of the plateau if I reached it. Even snug in the perfectly functioning plane, wasn't I a very naked creature in a lonely place? But I think any planet is a lonely place.

At four hundred feet I learned it was no blooming of flowers down there. The brilliance was that of scarlet fruit, on great tangles of low-growing bushes unlike any we had found on the plateau.

Evidently, while it grows, the fruit of those bushes wears a dull powdery bloom. The samples I later secured carried traces of it. It must be that in the final ripening the bloom loosens, washed away by the rain, so that when the hills break out in a sudden gleaming it's time for harvest.

The lizards were at it.

On every hillside where the fruit was shining, a dozen or more of those monsters writhed and scampered on short saurian legs. They paid no heed to the plane, nor to the hundreds of small bird-like creatures that darted about sharing the meal. It was hot holiday for the lizards in the genial sun; their black enormous jaws munched and slobbered, dripping scarlet. Here and there about the slopes, gorged pairs were breeding. When I cut the jets for brief glides I could hear the bellowing and roaring, smashing of bushes and the monstrous slap of black primordial flesh against flesh.

Just hungry and lusty hermaphrodite vegetarians having themselves a Mesozoic ball. But not too good for a little thin-hided foreign mammal who hadn't been invited. I climbed back to a thousand feet and began to get mad. They were first comers by several million years, had a right to the red lush stuff and needed it. But so did I.

A few miles further on I located

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a small valley in a pocket of the hills, with enough level ground for landing. The eastern of the two slopes closing it in bore the red splashes; the lizards were present there too, but not so numerously. I noticed only five or six as I circled down. If I dared climb that slope on foot for a hundred yards, I would be at the edge of the area where the bushes grew.

It became a thing that had to be done. I don't believe I was trying to prove anything. I haven't much patience with heroes. I'm afraid many of them have been in the pattern of Paul Cutter, ridden by the devil of one idea, and legend has supplied the pleasing part of the picture after silence took them. I'm simply a Randy who loves the idea of staying alive. I just wanted some of that fruit for my people and me.

The clamor of the beasts surged up to me as soon as I shut off the jets. Only a few, they made uproar enough for a convention. I lit nicely, coming to rest in the shadow of a tall solitary tree, and knew I must start at once, or hesitation would demoralize me. I took a sack for the fruit, and my .32, which might at least make me look like a hero later if one of the boys happened to step on me.

I was counting on the dullness of a primitive brain in a saurian hulk, too dim even for curiosity about the plane. I forgot that while the lizards were enjoying rich food and love, something else might be planning to enjoy the lizards. And, yes, there was a slight error of a few million years, for which I had no excuse after shooting mammals on the plateau. If Demeter's evolution has paralleled Earth's as closely as I think, those "lizards" are a survival from long ago. I was mistaking pseudo-Cenozoic for quasi-Mesozoic—Dr. Bunuan wouldn't have liked that.

At the base of that eastern slope the grass admitted some vegetation different from any I had so far seen. Many individual plants—call them weeds—were bushy, some taller than my head. This tall growth thickened as I climbed. For several yards I glimpsed no more of the revels up yonder, only heard the sodden gurgling and the roaring.

In the thicket I won a good look at one of the small flying animals clinging to a tall weed. It let me blunder within ten feet and then sailed off swift and airy. Not a bird; furry, with small teeth; the size of a big robin. The triangular wings are anchored, not to the hind foot like a bat's, but to the animal's side just below a rather large rib-cage. The free hind legs pull up in flight and vanish in the belly-fur. It seemed to me that two of the modified phalanges were projecting beyond the upper angle of the wing, but I couldn't be sure. Maybe they hang themselves up to sleep, like bats.

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At the upper limit of the thicket I halted to watch through the leaves. The nearest of the red-fruited bushes were still at some distance. I would have to step out in the open—not nice, but better than scuttling back from the riot empty-handed and licked. I told myself those jolly black nightmares were not aggressive. Their enormous grappling—just sex, Demeter style. I'd heard of sex.

The lizards' vision might be dim; maybe that was why they had ignored the plane. Really there was nothing terrible about them except their size. They wouldn't smell me—a light breeze blew toward me down the slope, bringing me their musky reek.

I crawfished into the sunlight holding open the mouth of my sack, and snatched at the red pear-shaped fruit, a little thieving mammal making off with whatever wasn't nailed down. The fruit, big and firm, separated readily from the stems, warm with sunshine, aromatic like muskmelon, smooth and delightful in the hand.

The lizards paid no attention, though the bushes where I was pilfering their steak and potatoes stood hardly twenty yards from the spot where the nearest one of them lurched about alone. And when the other beast crashed out of deep bushes up there on my left, the only lizard that acted aware of the attack was that nearest one—when he was knocked flat by the rushing impact, stricken in the belly by orange fangs.

Earth-born, I thought of it as a bear—shaggy block of body, massive head, thick long-clawed legs. The color was dull cinnamon. It was more than half the length of the lizard it assaulted, and taller—I suppose about the size of the brown Kodiak bears of Alaska. Now, being still alive, I peacefully remember, from boyhood reading, someone's statement that if a Kodiak bear stood upright inside an ordinary house his head would poke well into the second story—so it wouldn't do you much good to hightail into the bathroom and slam the door.

That killer was majestically casual, rearing over the lizard, driving down both forepaws as a bear might grab a log, twitching the black monster over on its back with impudent ease and tearing open the pale belly with a swipe of orange tusks. Then I think it sheared the muscles of the hind legs, the stabbing bites too swift for my eye to follow. The lizard's legs quit threshing; they twitched without effect or purpose. I saw no teeth in the howling cavern of the lizard's mouth. And while the bear began to feed on the slow-dying thing, the other lizards up the slope continued gorging and mating.

I'm not sure a small mammal

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from Earth's 21st Century should have witnessed that kind of death. No more significant than other kinds, but at this moment of writing I tend to remember it too much: the gaudy mess of it, the other lizards' unconcern, the mindless cruelty that was not cruelty at all but only single-minded hunger. For a second or two there in the sun I myself was lizard and bear, killer and killed, knowing down in the gut how it was for both of them.

After all, in the home cave of one of my great-grandfathers, Homo Pekinensis, there was a rather messy assortment of human bones, well gnawed; difficult to hush up that kind of family history.

I backed slowly into the thicket, once more Homo Quasi-sapiens. I had my peewee .32 out; my left hand clung to the sack with its couple of dozen lumps of scarlet treasure. Some noise I made must have caused the bear's head to swing. It saw me and stood quiet, measuring me with little wicked orange-veined eyes. A chunk of the lizard's liver hung dripping from its under jaw.

No use trying to freeze; it knew I was alive and interesting. It turned unhurriedly to study me. The piece of liver, bigger than my head, dropped to the ground. Not losing sight of me, the bear snuffed it, swallowed it in a gulp, and walked toward me, head swaying from side to side. Under stress one still observes: for the record, the pair of upper teeth that would be called canine in an Earth animal are about ten inches long, and slant outward; I believe the ends thrusting down beyond the under jaw have a slicing edge on the inner side.

I fired twice, trying for the eyes. Then I was in the thicket, reeling to one side as the crazed roaring mass plunged for the spot where I had been, and shuddered past me down the hill. It fell, rose on its hind legs to an impossible height, fell again rolling, scrabbling pitiably at its head with both paws, as a human being might clutch at a mortal wound. It should have been dead or helpless from the anesthetic poison in those bullets. But it would not die.

I followed. My body was sick and shaking. When the beast fell the second time, I managed to control my right hand and place more shots. One of them pierced the spine, for the bear plainly could not rise. But since it could not even then die, I must suppose the poison of those bullets has no rapid effect in the bloodstream of the animals of Demeter. The deer-like things, and the ocelot-like thing, I had shot on the plateau received heart or head wounds severe enough to account for the way they toppled over without a struggle. That bear was still trying to crawl toward me, hauling with

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vast forelegs, when I stepped close and put him out with a bullet that shattered the skull.

My wits came back, too gradually. I knew I was hearing something beside the commotion of the lizards up the hill. I pawed at the sweat dribbling into my eyes. Well, of course—that shrill imperious buzz could only be our radio in the plane. *Galileo* calling, report overdue.

My left hand was locked in a grip on that sack or I might have lost it. I remembered it as I reached the plane and flung it in ahead of me. I croaked: "Leroy to *Galileo,* over."

"Where the *hell* were you?" Madison was shouting. "You all right?

"Yes. Recon, away from plane, sorry, ran into bit of delay."

"All right."

"Sure. I just—"

He cut in sharply: "Where are you? Where's the plane?"

"I'm about thirty miles north of the plateau. Went to look for edible plants, found 'em too I think. I—"

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What's the fog, Davy? We can't even find the plateau."

"Fog?" I was panting, sick and stupid. "Fog, on the plateau?"

VI

Madison said carefully: "There are several areas of thick fog over the region of the plateau and south of there. They were still developing when we got your territory in the sights ten minutes ago. Now they seem to have stopped spreading. I'm watching a white blur the same size and shape as the plateau. I can see five other fog areas along the foothills to the south, none up where you must be. Over."

"I'm taking off." I did, my hands thinking for me. The jets roared and I was climbing.

"I think I see you—sun on the wings. In a valley, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"You'll see the fog from six or seven thousand, then save your fuel. And don't get nerved up—it looks like ordinary fog, milky white. I don't see how it could be smoke, starting in so many different places at once. . . . What about that geyser you reported? Are there others like it on the plateau?"

I had seen none; there could have been. A few of the open areas on the plateau were blank sand instead of grass. There could have been fissures with no vapor columns to reveal them. I remembered and mentioned the rain of the day before. "Could that have touched off something?"

Madison said: "Dr. Matsumoto thought of it when we saw the fog. He's sweating it out— I'm no geologist, Davy. He says it's reason-

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able—if a heavy seepage of water reached something hot underground, you might get a vapor cover like that. If it's just water vapor, it ought to dissipate fairly soon in this sunlight. Is there any wind?"

"Hardly any."

Now I could see it in the south, a horror of sluggishly heaving white where I had left my people at work and cheerful in a sparkling morning. And once again I glimpsed my island, far to the left, twenty miles out to sea. No fog there. A fringe of beach was peacefully gleaming; the low hills stood tranquil under the sun.

"You've reported there's never much wind."

"Only day before yesterday, wind and some overcast, the day before the rain. Inshore and offshore breezes night and morning, but at the camp we've hardly noticed them; the trees shut them away. . . . I'm at eight thousand and going down. I've got the landmarks beyond the plateau that show me where the camp is."

"You can't try to land till it clears—hell, what am I saying? You don't need to be told."

I didn't need to be told, but I wanted his voice, or failing that, my own. I reported on the morning's flight, the bushes on the hills, the shift to scarlet and the reason for it. I told him of the lizards' festival, the thing I had killed, the fruit with me in the plane cabin.

"There'll be food," he said, "and ways of growing more. Ways of doing without most of the things we knew on Earth."

"Including war."

"Including war, I hope, though not the causes of it, which were bound to travel with us, Davy. Look, I must say again, I must make sure you understand—there's been nothing in the reports to change my mind. And this fog doesn't, no matter what the reason for it is. This is our planet and we must take it, never mind your damn dinosaurs and cave bears and hair-worms—that's all duck soup. Don't worry about it." He sounded tired, and hoarse. "Where are you now?"

"About five miles to go. It looks like—just fog."

"What matters," he said, "is our people. The ways of living we must find. New problems. What to do about the—30-per-centers. A lot of things not in the Builders' Directives, Davy."

"We make our own, don't we?"

"Of course. And the Builders knew that. All they could give us were sketches—history. You know, Davy, I'm rather ashamed, how ignorant of history I was until three or four years ago, when Andrea began to get through my engineer's crust. Well . . . With this world we must somehow do better." Then when I most needed to hear him, his voice was cut short by a cough. He spoke two or three

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more words, blurred as if he had turned his face away from the transmitter. I caught the meaningless hum of other voices near him.

Confusion and then silence from the control room of *Galileo*. Seething below me, a white nothing of fog.

Down in that sea of blindness, Miranda and the others—I couldn't think. I climbed high with full power and drifted down again. If they were alive they would hear the jets. Why shouldn't they be alive? It was only fog—only fog. If it meant some upheaval from underground, that would have happened before, at other rains—but animals and plants lived on the plateau. Why shouldn't my people be alive?

Meanwhile *Galileo* was slipping away to the blind side of the world. I called them a few times. Then at last: "*Galileo* to Leroy." I knew that voice.

"Receiving."

"Del Sentiero, David. The Captain was called away. One of the patches of fog south of you is clearing. Can you find anything yet?"

"Not yet. Thought I saw treetops, but can't be sure. I'm climbing again, to try it from six thousand."

"David, consider this an order, as if Captain Madison were transmitting it. When the fog clears, if you find the worst has happened and the others are lost—though there's no reason I can see to expect it—you will then do everything possible to keep your own self alive, and you will assist the rest of the colony in coming down. . . . Are you hearing me?"

"Yes. The rest of the—"

"We're coming down. Tomorrow or the day after."

"But—"

"Forget the four weeks. I can't give you details—no time, we'll soon be out of range. See anything yet?"

"Treetops—yes—it can't be anything else—yes!" I was babbling. The plane had gone dangerously low. I shot up away from the white confusion, but the spots of darkness I had seen could only be treetops.

Del Sentiero was saying: "You'll find them. Just fog. One place south of you looks almost normal. Did a minute ago, I mean. We're out of sight now." His voice was smooth but faint. I lost some other words in a crackle of static. They would be slipping to the other side, presently watching the depth of Demeter's night.

I rechecked the outer landmarks. The tallest trees near our clearing grew by the pond. I saw those tops rising from the swirl of fog and recognized them, dripping, steaming with a thinner vapor in the sun.

Then at the top of the tallest tree—motion, a flutter of white

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and blue. Why, on all the world of Demeter I don't suppose there's more than one such bit of color, and that one is a blouse Miranda wears. I was shouting like an idiot as I dipped the plane to let her know I had seen it. Then I swept around and rose—not high this time, no need.

Cottony white smothered the clearing still, but it was dwindling. Soon I made out the upper half of our dome shelter. I could find time now to fret about *Galileo*, and Captain Madison. He couldn't have been called away by trouble with the ship, could he? My ignorant mind pecked at the notion of an error in the orbit—then I was going down into a rolling ground-fog, knowing that the fog was no more than four or five feet thick on the landing strip. I touched down, and stepped into vapor barely waist-high, walked through it over the invisible grass.

Miranda was still waving her blouse like a flag as we ran to each other in the mist, speaking the same stumbling words and not by chance: "What am I without you?"

The damp air carried a faint reek of sulfur and something unidentifiable; not a sharp irritant, merely unpleasant. Some fog swirled to my nostrils; I breathed it with no apparent harm, as Miranda talked in a roughened, uncomfortable voice.

"The others must be all right. I breathed it, I'm alive. I think they're still in the shelter. I'd gone to the pond for drinking water when it began. I thought, just evaporation from wet ground, then it came thicker, I couldn't see my way back to the shelter. Couldn't see a foot ahead, eyes watered." I saw they were still slightly inflamed; her cute nose was reddened; but she was alive. "I called, I guess they didn't hear—it choked me some, couldn't make much noise. People can't live here, Davy, if this happens."

"No, but I've found a place where they can. Our island—wait till you see—no fog there." I couldn't talk well either.

She was rubbing her face in my shirt. "Couldn't think of anything but that tree."

"Good thinking."

"At the top, it was all around me still, but I knew you'd be coming back. I just hung on—"

I said: "How else would we ever win Demeter . . . ?"

Laurette was in the shelter, in her "room"—we used that word for the plastic-walled compartments that gave us a bit of privacy—and she was alone. I shouted for Paul and heard no answer. Laurett was red-eyed, red-nosed, from the vapor I think, and not from tears. As Miranda hurried in, Laurette looked up from the table where she sat, indifferently, almost as if puzzled by Miranda's urgency.

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"Laurette, come out of this! It's clearing outside. Davy's got back." Laurette blinked; Miranda shook her. "What's the matter? Come out into the air, it's much cleaner outside."

Laurette stood up then drowsily and left the shelter with us. She gazed about the clearing, where now the fog was no more than a heaving, milky blur over the grass. She said: "We go on living a while?"

"Laurette, what's happened?"

"Why, nothing, Miranda." She was not speaking impatiently. "I understand it now, that's all. We weren't meant to come here."

"Not meant"—for once in my life I saw Miranda angry. She started once or twice to speak, then only said, with too much restraint: "Forgive me if I don't think you're that much wiser than the rest of us."

"Nothing to forgive." Laurette spoke gently, and with the note of forgiveness. "I'm not, dear, it's not *my* wisdom. You see, we've all been very stupid. The radiation sickness back on Earth—that was the judgment. We should have understood then."

Miranda's brown eyes went incandescent, then quiet. "Well," she said, "maybe you'd still better forgive me, for understanding my own little speck of life rather differently."

I noticed a table outside the shelter, part of Laurette's laboratory equipment, overturned, solutions spilled, glassware broken. No great damage except the loss of several hours of good work. I asked: "Did Paul do that? Where is he, Laurette?"

"No," she said remotely, "I did it. I'm sorry—I guess I got a bit emotional: silly of me. I know you don't look at these things the way I do. Paul—I don't know. He went off somewhere, into the fog." She shrugged, turning more matter-of-fact, more like the girl we had known. "I won't disgrace you again. I can see we're nothing but naughty children fighting against the will of God, but since we're still alive—well, that must be His will too—somehow. I won't say any more about it—you can't see it my way, you don't understand. . . . I couldn't see for sure, David, but I think Paul went—that way." She pointed toward the pond.

"You two stay together while I find him. That's an order . . ."

I found him soon, by the noise of his footsteps, a small man blundering toward me through misty tree-shadows, halting when he saw me, frowning with folded arms but letting me approach, too unhappy to be absurd. His mouth was tight, his inflamed eyes steady on me and aloof. "Leroy—did Captain Madison order you to go on that flight this morning?"

"Order me?" I was stupidly puzzled. "No. He suggested it . . . How do you feel?"

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"As you can see, I am still alive." He tapped a foot on the ground, brooding, watching me. "He suggested it—I suppose after a conference with Dr. Matsumoto?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I know—I'm not supposed to be able to figure things out . . . I dare say, as soon as you reported that vapor coming out of the rock, Matsumoto guessed what might happen after a rain. Then he, and Carey of course, and Madison—oh well, let it go. You're just a sort of —innocent tool, Leroy. You know that, don't you?"

In a way, I blame Paul's paranoid state at that time partly on the fog. I don't know its chemical qualities—I suppose our experts will study it when the colony comes down—but I do know one true name for the thing that rode that mist: Fear. Laurette had retreated, in her fashion. Paul had retreated, into this. Miranda—just hung on. And I was by force of circumstances a pilot. With a Randy's scattered knowledge of everything in general and nothing in particular, I groped after what I ought to do here and now. I said: "Paul, the colony is coming down tomorrow or the day after. Del Sentiero just told me so."

"Del Sentiero!" Something blazed up cleanly in him—courage or hope or common sense—and a great deal of the misery and sour suspicion drained away. I take no credit for it; I hadn't remembered that del Sentiero was one of the few he admired and, more important, trusted. "Well!—that's different! Tomorrow? They're not waiting?"

"No. The ship went out of range before del Sentiero could explain it, but I got that much for sure. And I've found a place where there's no fog, an island. We're going there now, soon as we can pack up—let's get going."

"An island." He liked that too. He rubbed his face, and smiled, and delivered the greatest understatement so far made on the planet Demeter: "I suppose my judgment isn't always too good, Dave, and I've been under a—sort of strain."

"Sure," I said. "Let's move." I bumped his shoulder, and we walked peacefully back to the plane, damn near friends.

Today is the 21st of June, and the sound of ocean beyond our shelter is the music I remember from childhood.

It is not the month of June on the planet Earth. Andrea del Sentiero (whom I shall see tomorrow) suggested we might give that name to our first month here, because in the old world June was a month of beauty and beginnings, an end to the troubling dangerous time of spring.

The orbit of Demeter and the phases of the green moon give us a year of fourteen four-week

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months. We can name the others as we please, when June is over. Next year, if the bushes grow that quickly from the seed I took, the hills of this island will redden with the harvest of early summer. But this is the 21st of June in the Year One.

The island is quiet. I miss the morning and evening music of the birds I remember. I miss the butterflies and moths, the dragonflies. We shall gradually learn about other creatures of Demeter, and our children—if we can have them—will feel no such nostalgia.

A firm beach two miles long faces the mainland, and two promontories like the horns of a crescent create a bay there; it would be a good harbor for boats of shallow draft. I landed on the beach. The larger landing ships from *Galileo* can touch down on the water and ride in easily. East of the crescent, the island is an oval block of about thirty square miles, the only level land in small mountain valleys of the interior. I noticed lakes and streams, one large enough to be called a river. No red fruit grows on the slopes. I believe it will.

We flew low over every part of the island before landing. Miranda spotted a few "deer." No larger forms; no lizards. The bears could be living here—if they are they'll have to go the hard way. We have searched samples of the beach sand for hair-worms and found none. They may be here but didn't Captain Madison himself call that sort of thing duck soup?

We had the shelter up, under tree cover at the edge of the beach, when *Galileo* called in again. It was Andrea del Sentiero. Even that early, I could honestly give him a good report of the island, and he told me once more that the colony would come down without waiting for the four weeks. I asked for three or four days to explore and make sure, and he agreed—I may have spent too much of that time in writing up this sketchy personal account. But we know the island is good. As for shortening the pilot mission—well, those people up there voted so.

In a sense, they voted against the Builders' Directives, or at least against the logic of the pilot mission, which so far as I can see is still perfectly unanswerable—as logic. Against it, our people mount the equally unanswerable logic of love. They said in effect that since we four had come down, they could do nothing but follow.

Del Sentiero said: "David, with regard to Captain Madison . . ."

The silence hurt. I said: "What?"

"I'm sorry, I was hunting for words, but there are none of the kind I need. I suggest you remember the legend of Moses. It happened very quickly, David. A

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coronary—he'd been getting warnings; no one else knew of it except Dr. Dana. After that coughing spell—I guess you heard it—he turned to us and said: 'Davy's going down, but the fog is clearing.' Then I think his eyes troubled him, because he stood up and tried to move nearer the viewplate. I reached him before he fell. He said: 'We'll do better—we must.'

"That was all, David—but I think he was satisfied that we would. . . . You agree?"

"Yes."

And I do. Laurette may see us as the naughty rebellious children of God. Paul may spin visions of a perfect state that can never exist except inside the sanctuary of a lonely mind. Miranda will just hang on. And I think we shall be able to deal with each other in charity, more or less, and mind our campfires.

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SCIENCE

The good doctor with the special gift of rendering complexities plain, this month turns his attention to a concept which is particularly difficult to visualize . . . and then takes us two steps further.

VARIETIES OF THE INFINITE

by Isaac Asimov

There are a number of words that publishers like to get into the titles of s.f. books as an instant advertisement to fans that these books are indeed science fiction. Two such words are, of course, "space" and "time." Others are "Earth" (capitalized), "Mars," "Venus," "Alpha Centauri," "tomorrow," "stars," "sun," "asteroids," and so on. And one —to get to the nub of this month's article—is "infinity."

One of the best s.f. titles ever invented, in my opinion, is John Campbell's "Invaders from the Infinite." The word "invaders" is redolent of aggression, action, and suspense, while "infinite" brings up the vastness and terror of outer space.

Donald Day's indispensable *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines* lists "Infinite Brain," "Infinite Enemy," "Infinite Eye," "Infinite Invasion," "Infinite Moment," "Infinite Vision," and "Infinity Zero" in its title index, and I am sure there are many other titles containing the word.

Yet with all this exposure; with the word being almost the private property of our literary field; do we know what "infinite" and "infinity" mean? Perhaps not all of us do.

A large number of s.f. readers, I imagine, might begin by suggesting that infinity is a large number; a very large number; in fact, the largest number that can exist.

If so, they would at once be wrong, for infinity is not a large number

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or any kind of number at all; at least not of the sort we think of when we say "number." It certainly isn't the largest number that could exist for there isn't any such thing.

Let's sneak up on infinity, by supposing first that you wanted to write out instructions to a bright youngster, telling him how to go about counting the 538 people who had paid to attend a lecture. There would be one particular door through which all the audience would leave in single file. The youngster need merely apply to each person one of the various integers in the proper order: 1, 2, 3 and so on.

The phrase "and so on" implies continuing to count until all the people have left, and the last person who leaves has received the integer, 538. If you want to make the order explicit, you might tell the boy to count in the following fashion and then painstakingly list all the integers from 1 to 538. This would be unbearably tedious, and the boy you are dealing with is bright and knows the meaning of a gap containing a dotted line, so you write: "Count thus: 1, 2, 3 . . . 536, 537, 538." The boy will then understand (or should understand) that the dotted line indicates a gap to be filled by all the integers from 4 to 535 inclusive, in order and without omission.

Suppose you didn't know what the number of the audience was. It might be 538 or 427 or 651. You could instruct the boy to count until an integer had been given to the last man, whatever the man, whatever the integer. To express that symbolically, you could write thus: "Count: 1, 2, 3 . . . n–2, n–1, n." The bright boy would understand that "n" routinely represents some unknown but definite integer.

Now suppose the next task you set your bright youngster is to count the number of men entering a door, filing through a room, out a second door, around the building and through the first door again, the men forming a continuous closed system.

Imagine both marching men and counting boy to be completely tireless and willing to spend an eternity in their activities. Obviously the task would be endless. There would be no last man at all, and there is no last integer at all, ever. (Any integer, however large, even if it consists of a series of digits stretching in microscopic size from here to the farthest star can easily be increased by 1.)

How do we write instructions for the precise counting involved in such a task? We can write: "Count thus: 1, 2, 3, and so on endlessly."

An endless count involves an infinite number of integers (and "infinite" *is* only Latin for "endless"). The word "infinity" is not, therefore a number, or an integer, but merely a quality of endlessness. We can

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symbolize the quality of endlessness of the series of integers by means of an 8 set on its side. This sideways 8 is familiar to all of you, but the kindly editor looks pained whenever I want to make use of any symbol that is not in the average printer's font. Rather than allow any pain to accrue to him, I suggest we let the quality of endlessness be represented by *INF* (for "infinity", in case you haven't guessed).

Even though *INF* is not a number, we can still put it through certain arithmetical operations. We can do that much for any symbol. We can do it for letters in algebra and write $a + b = c$. Or we can do it for chemical formulae and write: $CH_4 + 3O_2 = CO_2 + 2H_2O$. Or we can do it for abstractions, such as: Man + Woman = Trouble.

The only thing we must remember is that in putting symbols that are not integers through arithmetical paces, we ought not to be surprised if they don't follow the ordinary rules of arithmetic which, after all, were originally worked out to apply specifically to integers.

For instance, $3 - 2 = 1$, $17 - 2 = 15$, $4875 - 2 = 4873$. In general any integer, once 2 is subtracted, becomes a different integer. Anything else is unthinkable.

But now suppose we subtract 2 from the unending series of integers. For convenience sake, we can omit the first two integers, 1 and 2, and start the series: 3, 4, 5 and on endlessly. You see, don't you, that you can be just as endless starting the integers at 3 as at 1, so that you can write: 3, 4, 5 . . . *INF*.

In other words, when 2 items are subtracted from an infinite set, what remains is still an infinite set. In symbols, we can write this: $INF - 2 = INF$. This looks odd because we are used to integers, where subtracting 2 makes a difference. But "infinity" is not an integer and works by different rules. (This can't be repeated often enough.)

For that matter, if you lop off the first 3 integers or the first 25 or the first 1,000,000,000,000, what is left of the series of integers is still endless. You can always start, say, with 1,000,000,000,001, 1,000,000,000,002 and go on endlessly. So $INF - n = INF$ where "n" represents any integer, however great.

In fact, we can be more startling than that. Suppose we consider only the even integers. We would have a series that would go: 2, 4, 6 and so on endlessly. It would be an infinite series and could therefore be written: 2, 4, 6 . . . *INF*. In the same way, the odd integers would form an infinite series and could be written: 1, 3, 5 . . . *INF*.

Now, then, suppose you went through the series of integers and crossed out every even integer you had. From the infinite series of in-

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tegers, you would have eliminated an infinite series of even integers and you would have left behind an infinite series of odd integers. This can be symbolized as *INF — INF = INF.*

Furthermore, it could work the other way about. If you started with the even integers only and added one odd integer, or two, or five, or a trillion, you would still merely have an unending series so that *INF* + n = *INF*. In fact, if you added the unending series of odd integers to the unending series of even integers, you would simply have the unending series of all integers, or: *INF* + *INF* = *INF*.

By this point, however, it is just possible that some of you may suspect me of pulling a fast one.

After all, in the first 10 integers, there are 5 even integers and 5 odd ones; in the first 1,000 integers, there are 500 even integers and 500 odd integers; and so on. No matter how many consecutive integers we take, half are always even and half are odd.

Therefore, although the series 2, 4, 6 . . . *is* endless, the total can only be half as great as the total of the also endless series 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 . . . And the same is true for the series 1, 3, 5 . . . which, though endless, is only half as great as the series of all integers.

And so (you might think) in subtracting the set of even integers from the set of all integers to obtain the set of odd integers, what we are doing can be represented as: *INF* — ½ *INF* = ½ *INF*. That, you might think with a certain satisfaction, "makes sense."

To answer that objection, let's go back to counting the unknown audience at the lecture. Our bright boy, who has been doing all our counting, and is tired of it, turns to you and asks, "How many seats are there in the lecture hall?" You answer, "640."

He thinks a little and says, "Well, I see that every seat is taken. There are no empty seats and there is no one standing."

You, having equally good eyesight, say, "That's right."

"Well, then," says the boy, "why count them as they leave? We know right now that there are exactly 640 spectators."

And he's correct. If two series of objects (A series and B series) just match up so that there is one and only one A for every B and one and only one B for every A, then we know that the total number of A objects is just equal to the total number of B objects.

In fact, this is what we do when we count. If you want to know how many teeth there are in the fully equipped human mouth, we assign to each tooth one and only one number (in order) and we apply each number to one and only one tooth. (This is called placing two

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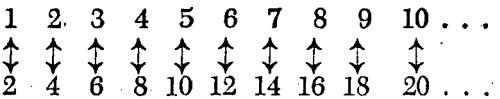
series into "one-to-one correspondence.") We find that we need only 32 numbers to do this, so that the series: 1, 2, 3 . . . 30, 31, 32 can be exactly matched with the series: one tooth, next tooth, next tooth, . . . next tooth, next tooth, last tooth.

And therefore, we say, the number of teeth in the fully equipped human mouth is the same as the number of integers from 1 to 32 inclusive. Or, to put it tersely: there are 32 teeth.

Now we can do the same for the set of even integers. We can write down the even integers and give each one a number. Of course, we can't write down all the even integers, but we can write down some and get started anyway. We can write the number assigned to each even integer directly above it, with a double-headed arrow, so:



We can already see a system here. Every even integer is assigned one particular number and no other, and you can tell what the particular number is by dividing the even integer by 2. Thus, the even integer, 38, has the number 19 assigned to it and no other. The even integer 24,618, has the number 12,309 assigned to it. In the same way, any given number in the series of all integers can be assigned to one and only one even integer. The number 538 is applied to even integer 1,076 and to no other. The number 29,999,999 is applied to even integer 59,999,998, and no other; on so on.

Since every number in the series of even integers can be applied to one and only one number in the series of all integers, and vice versa, the two series are in one-to-one correspondence and are equal. The number of even integers, then, is equal to the number of all integers. By a similar argument, the number of odd integers is equal to the number of all integers.

You may object by saying that when all the even integers (or odd integers) are used up, there will still be fully half the series of all integers left over. Maybe so, but the argument has no meaning since the series of even integers (or odd integers) will never be used up.

Therefore, when we say that "all integers" minus "even integers" equals "odd integers," this *is* like saying $INF - INF = INF$, and terms like $\frac{1}{2}\ INF$ can be thrown out.

In fact, in subtracting even integers from all integers, we are crossing out every other number, and thus, in a way, dividing the series by 2.

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Since the series is still unendng $INF/2 = INF$ anyway, so what price half of infinity?

Better yet, if we crossed out every other integer in the series of even integers, we would have an unending series of integers divisible by 4; and if we crossed out every other integer in that series, we would have an unending series of integers divisible by 8, and so on endlessly. Each one of these "smaller" series could be matched up with the series of all integers in one-to-one correspondence. If an unending series of integers can be divided by 2 endlessly, and still remain endless, then we are saying that $INF / INF = INF$.

If you doubt that endless series that have been drastically thinned out can be put into one-to-one correspondence with the series of all integers, just consider those integers that are multiples of one trillion. You have: 1,000,000,000,000; 2,000,000,000,000; 3,000,000,000,000 . . . *INF*. These are matched up with 1, 2, 3 . . . *INF*. For any number in the set of "trillion-integers", say 4,856,000,000,000,000, there is one and only one number in the set of all integers, which, in this case, is 4,856. For any number in the set of all integers, say 342, there is one and only one number in the set of "trillion-integers", in this case, 342,000,000,000,000. Therefore, there are as many integers divisible by a trillion as there are integers altogether.

It works the other way around, too. If you place between each number the midway fraction, thus: ½, 1, 1½, 2, 2½, 3, 3½ . . . *INF*, you are, in effect, doubling the number of items in the series, and yet this new series can be put into one-to-one correspondence with the set of integers, so that $2\ INF = INF$. In fact, if you keep on doing it indefinitely, putting in all the fourths, then all the eighths, then all the sixteenths, you can still keep the resulting series in one-to-one correspondence with the set of all integers so that $INF \times INF = INF\ 2 = INF$.

This may seem too much to swallow. How can all the fractions be lined up so that we can be sure that each one is getting one and only one number? It is easy to line up integers, 1, 2, 3, or even integers, 2. 4, 6, or prime numbers, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 . . . But how can you line up fractions and be sure that all are included, even fancy ones like 14,899/2,725,523 and 689,444,473/2.

There are, however, several ways to make up an inclusive list of fractions. Suppose we first list all the fractions in which the numerator and denominator add up to 2. There is only one of these: 1/1. Then list the fractions of which the numerator and denominator add up to 3.

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There are two of these: 2/1 and 1/2. Then we have 3/1, 2/2, and 1/3, where the numerator and denominator add up to 4. Then we have 4/1, 3/2, 2/3, and 1/4. In each group, you see, we place the fractions in the order of decreasing numerator and increasing denominator.

If we make such a list: 1/1, 2/1, 1/2, 3/1, 2/2, 1/3, 4/1, 2/3, 3/2, 1/4, 5/1, 4/2, 3/3, 2/4, 1/5 and so on endlessly, we can be assured that any particular fraction, no matter how complicated, will be included if we proceed far enough. The fraction 14,899/2,725,523 will be in that group of fractions in which the numerator and denominator add up to 2,740,422, and it will be the 2,725,523rd of the group. Similarly, 689,444,473/2 will be the second fraction in the group in which the numerator and the denominator add up to 689,444,475. Every possible fraction will thus have its particular assigned place in the series.

It follows, then, that every fraction has its own number and that no fraction will be left out. Moreover, every number has its own fraction and no number is left out. The series of all fractions is put into a one-to-one corespondence with the series of all integers, and thus the number of all fractions is equal to the number of all integers.

(In the list of fractions above, you will see that some are equal in value. Thus, 1/2 and 2/4 are listed as different fractions, but both have the same value. Fractions like 1/1, 2/2 and 3/3 not only have the same value but that value is that of an integer, 1. All this is all-right. It shows that the total number of fractions is equal to the total number of integers even though in the series of fractions, the value of each particular fraction, and all integral values as well, is repeated many times; in fact, endlessly.)

By now you have more or less reluctantly decided that all unendingness is the same unendingness and that "infinity" is "infinity" no matter what you do to it. Not so!

Consider the points in a line. A line can be marked off at equal intervals, and the marks can represent points which are numbered 1, 2, 3, and so on endlessly, if you imagine the line continuing endlessly. The midpoints between the integer-points can be marked, ½, 1½, 2½ . . . and then the thirds can be marked and the fourths and the fifths and indeed all the unending number of fractions can be assigned to some particular point.

It would seem then that every point in the line would have some fraction or other assigned to it. Surely there would be no point in the line left out after an unending number of fractions had been assigned to it.

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Oh, wouldn't there?

There is a point on the line, you see, that would be represented by a value equal to the square root of two ($\sqrt{2}$). This can be shown as follows: If you construct a square on the line with each side exactly equal to the interval of one integer already marked off on the line, then the diagonal of the square would be just equal to $\sqrt{2}$; if that diagonal is laid down on the line, starting from the zero point, the end of that diagonal coincides with the point of the line whch can be set equal to $\sqrt{2}$.

Now the catch is that the value of $\sqrt{2}$ cannot be represented by a fraction; by any fraction; by any conceivable fraction. This was proved by the ancient Greeks and the proof is simple but I'll ask you to take my word for it here and save the details for another article some day. Well, if all the fractions are assigned to various points in the line, at least one point, that which corresponds to $\sqrt{2}$, will be left out.

All numbers which can be represented as fractions are "rational numbers" because a fraction is really the ratio of two numbers, the numerator and the denominator. Numbers which cannot be represented as fractions are "irrational numbers" and $\sqrt{2}$ is by no means the only one of those, although it was the first such to be discovered. Most square roots, cube roots, fourth roots, etc. are irrationals; so are most sines, cosines, tangents, etc.; so are numbers involving pi (π), so are logarithms.

In fact, there are an unending number of irrational numbers. It can be shown that between any two points represented by rational numbers on a line, however close those two points are, there is always at least one point represented by an irrational number.

Together, the rational numbers and irrational numbers are spoken of as "real numbers." It can be shown that any given real number can be made to correspond to one and only one point in a given line; and that any point in the line can be made to correspond to one and only one real number. In other words, a point in a line which can't be assigned a fraction, can always be assigned an irrational. No point can be missed by both categories.

The series of real numbers and the series of points in a line are therefore in one-to-one correspondence and are equal.

Now the next question is: Can the series of all real numbers, or of all points in a line (the two being equivalent) be set into a one-to-one correspondence with the series of integers? The answer is, NO!

It can be shown that no matter how you arrange your real numbers or your points, no matter what conceivable system you use; an endless

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number of either real numbers or points will always be left out. (The reasoning behind this I will also skip.) The result is that we are in the same situation as that in which we are faced with an audience in which all seats are taken and there are people standing. We are forced to conclude that there are more people than seats. And so, in the same way, we are forced to conclude that there are more real numbers, or points in a line, than there are integers.

If we want to express the endless series of points by symbols, we don't want to use the symbol *INF* for "and so on endlessly", since this has been all tied up with integers and rational numbers generally. Instead, the symbol "C" is usually used, standing for "continuum," since all the points in a line represent a continuous line.

We can therefore write the series: Point 1, Point 2, Point 3, . . . C.

Now we have a variety of endlessness that is different and *more intensely endless* than the endlessness represented by "ordinary infinity."

This new and more intense endlessness also has its peculiar arithmetic. For instance, the points in a short line can be matched up one-for-one with the points in a long line, or the points in a plane, or the points in a solid. In fact, let's not prolong the agony, and say at once that there are as many points in a line a millionth of an inch long as there are points in all of space.

About 1895, the German mathematician, Georg Cantor, worked out the arithmetic of infinity and also set up a whole series of different varieties of endlessnesses, which he called "transfinite numbers."

He represented these transfinite numbers by the letter "ALEPH," which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and which is usually written as the Hebrew letter. However, for the sake of pleasant relations with the kindly editor and the noble printer, I will use ALEPH.

The various transfinites can be listed in increasing size or, rather, in increasing intensity of endlessness by giving each one a subscript, beginning with zero. The very lowest transfinite would be "ALEPH-NULL"; then there would be "ALEPH-ONE," "ALEPH-TWO," and so on, endlessly.

Generally, whatever you do to a particular transfinite number in the way of adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing, leaves it unchanged. A change comes only when you raise a transfinite to a transfinite power equal to itself (not to a transfinite power less than itself). Then it is increased to the next higher transfinite. Thus: ALEPH-NULL$^{\text{ALEPH-NULL}}$ = ALEPH-ONE; ALEPH-ONE$^{\text{ALEPH-ONE}}$ = ALEPH-TWO; and so on.

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What we usually consider as "infinity," the endlessness of the integers, has been shown to be equal to "ALEPH-NULL." In other words: *INF* = ALEPH-NULL. And so the tremendous vastness of ordinary infinity turns out to be the very smallest of all the transfinites.

That variety of endlessness which we have symbolized as C *may* be represented by "ALEPH-ONE," so that C = ALEPH-ONE; but this has not been proven. No mathematician has yet been able to prove that there is any infinite series which has an endlessness more intense than the endlessness of the integers but less intense than the endlessness of the points in a line. However, neither has any mathematician been able to prove that such an intermediate endlessness does *not* exist.

If the continuum *is* equal to ALEPH-ONE, then we can finally write an equation for our friend, "ordinary infinity," which will change it: $INF^{INF} = C$.

Finally, it has been shown that the endlessness of all the curves that can be drawn on a plane is even more intense than the endlessness of points in a line. In other words, there is no way of lining up the curves so that they can be matched one-to-one with the points in a line, without leaving out an unending series of the curves. This endlessness of curves may be equal to "ALEPH-TWO," but that hasn't been proved yet, either.

And that is all. Assuming that the endlessness of integers is ALEPH-NULL, and the endlessness of points is ALEPH-ONE, and the endlessness of curves is ALEPH-TWO, we have come to the end. Nobody has ever suggested any variety of endlessness which could correspond to ALEPH-THREE (let alone to ALEPH-THIRTY or ALEPH-THREE-MILLION).

As John E. Freund says in his book *A Modern Introduction to Mathematics* (Prentice Hall, 1956, and a book that I recommend to all who found this article in the least interesting), "It seems that our imagination does not permit us to count beyond *three* when dealing with infinite sets."

Still, if we now return to the title *Invaders from the Infinite*, I think we are entitled to ask, with an air of phlegmatic calm, "Which infinite? Just ALEPH-NULL? Nothing more?"

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QUINTET

The imaginative eye of a child sees without the blinders of culture and sophistication, and the result, in the case of a truly creative child, is a fresh and different kind of art which an adult cannot easily duplicate. . . . Or can he? That is the question at hand. At least one of the following pieces was written by a child under 12; at least one was written by either Damon Knight, Jane Rice, Theodore Sturgeon, or Alfred Bester—all of whom are, shall we say, over 35. All of the pieces are, we think, worth reading on any grounds; we offer the additional piquancy of asking you to guess which of the following bylines are the actual names of creative children, and which hide the identities of professional writers. To give you adequate time to think about it, we withhold the answers till next month.

THE BLACK NEBULEA

The first men that came back from the moon bruoght back the terribly diseace called MOON-GLOW from the germs on it wich made it shine and nobody fond out until it was to late. After millons and millons of poeple died the Supr. Consil agree'd there was only one man who culd cure it and he was in jail.

Buck Sulivan was the man in jail and it was a frame Up wich he was to honest to tell. The Supr. Consil told him "we will let you go free if you can find a cure wich we think is on a planet in the black nebulea were a race of meddical genuses has a powerful but peacful civilsation." you are the only man they said becaus you were broght up out west to shoot fast and learned jujizzu in the army and you have an iq of 1,000.

Buck Sulivan said yes alright he wold do it.

In the black Nebulea everthing was black until a tinny spot of light showed a planet but in the telescop and all instrumnts showd blank like notheing was on it. But when Buck Sullivan brught his star ship down on it's tails all look'd green and full of life and the air normal in adition to the gravety.

"Well this is strange Buck Sulivan said when he came out of his ship There was a 1,000 men meeting him with guns "I thoght you were a peacfull planet?

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They told him they were fighteing the head tyrrant on the planet who bosed every body and they wanted him to be there general but he said no I only want to cure the diseace killing the univers.

Soon a big man swagered up to him and said I am the head tyrrant of the Black planet but am geting old and you are the only man tofgh enogh to be my partners. I will give you ½ of everthing. But Buck Sulivan jujizzu'd him for being a tyrrant and said I was framed onse and onse is enogh."

Then in the capital city of the planet wich was made like a big hospitl a bautifull girl came to him and said you will starve to dead even if you eat and drink forevr and Buck Sullivan asked why. "She said it is not real food on the black Planet notheing is real becaus we are all dead and we are gohsts from the same disese MOONGLOW.

Soon Buck Sulivan kissed her and laufghed and said you feel real to me but she said shoot me with you'r Colt-95 and see. And at 1st he did'nt want to but she made him and made him and finely he shoot her and notheing hapened.

Their? you see she said and Buck Sulivan was sad becuase he lik'd her and he asked If you are all dead how come I can see you and she said Becaus you are a gohst to?

It was true because the hole univers died.

—Sonny Powell

UP, DOWN, and SIDEWAYS

Once upon a dimension there was a king of Adanac called Tempus Fugit who had three sons called Up, Down and Sideways. One day their father called them to the throne room and he said "I want to see you all happily married before I die" So they started of to get brides.

Up easly found a tall girl, Down found a small girl, but Sideways could not find a nice girl so he had to get into his flying teserac and go to another planet.

One continuum while flying through Hipyrospace he suddenly went of control because the sterring was not working. So he went on the handle to see what was wrong. There he saw a third dimensionuel witch who when seeing her cat fall off her broom screamed her self into the forth dimension. When she asked if she might get into his forth dimensionuel teserac, he said yes as she did so it turned into a third dimensionuel cube, because she was a witch. When Sideways asked how he might get back to his di-

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mension she answered you must find a girl that can scream you back into your dimension. . . .

So the Prince started produceing a mouse, every time he met a girl. One day after serching the United States and part of Canada he found a girl in Kitimat. They got into the cube and Sideways took a mouse and showed it to her and she screamed them into the fourth dimension but going through the dimension everything must change exect the prince, so she was flated when he got home with her they could not see her stright on, only sideways so she was just right for Sideways so all the Princes were married and had great adventures together.

—JOHN CUNNINGTON

Witch's Charm

Seeds of a high-grown mistletoe!
Boil them fast and medium-slow,
Stir them swift, then slow and soon
Ere this night has seen the moon,
Throw in newt's eyes
(the regular size),
A dragon's tooth,
A unicorn's hoof,
Toe of a tadpole,
Voice of a mole.
Stir in a poisoned snake-dog's gut,
Mash a bug found in a rut.
Pig's squeal,
Baby-doll's heel,
Stir all, stir all
Till the goblins call,
Then cool it with a sea-toy's blood.
Then our charm is fine and good.
By the breaking of the thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.

Open, locks,
Whatever knocks.

—NINA PETTIS

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THE MAN WHO TOLD LIES

ONCE THERE WAS A MAN WHO ALL the time told lies and everybody hated him and diden't trust him even when he said what time it is they woulden't believe him so one day the craziest thing hapened he was driving his car to work in the morning and his car slipped on a banana peal only it was reely a whole bunch of banana peals where a garbage truck had a accident and spilled on the road so he cracked a lampost.

The policemen was really mad about it and pinched the man to the courthouse and it took a while to get it all fixed. So when he got to work he was late and his boss said what hapened to you and the man said my car sliped on a banana peal and the boss said you're a liar everybody knows that and if I got any more trouble from you out you go. And no matter what the man said they woulden't beleive him.

So he was walking in the park afterwards and he felt real mean and low and he sat down and a funny little man sat down on the bench too and said whats the matter. And the man said everybody picks on me I am a well known liar and when I get around to telling the truth nobdy believes me anyway. The other man said gosh I can fix that easy because I am a Magician so the man said he dident beleive in that Magic stuff and the old man said you want people to beleive you you got to start out beleiving me so the man said alright then and the Magician made a spell wich dident hurt.

So he forgot about it for awhile until he met a lady he knew and she said hello hello I'm glad to see you and he was going to say he was glad to see her but he wasen't because he dident reely like her she gave him a pain so what came out of his mouth was Well Im not glad to see you because you give me a pain so she got so mad she was going to hit him with her pocket book but he ran. So then later he went to dinner were he was invited and the lady said how did you like the dinner and before he could stop he said the meat was tough and the peas taste like garbage which was the truth. So there was one more person who diden't like him.

In the morning the boss was going to give him a raise so he called him in to the ofice and said Well how do you like working here and the man said before he could stop I dont like the work and I dont like you eather wich was the truth. So the boss fired him. Then he went walking in the park again to find the little Magician man. And he found him and said to take off the Magic spell because he said he was a lot better when he was a liar. He said the way it is now I get

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in trouble every time I open my mouth it seems everybody tells lies to each other all the time like Im glad to see you and I wish you luck and all that when they reely dont mean it. Well the Magician said you just dont know which lies to tell and which not to I hope you learn a lesson but about the spell your out of luck because that spell is pernamet so just work hard and watch what you say.

Then the man got a new job and worked hard as he could and when people asked him anything he just shut his mouth and worked even harder. So when he got home that night his wife said how about the new job is the work hard and he said yes wich it was she said are you tired and he said tired Im dead so then he droped dead.

—Billy Watson

Night Thought

I was born with a caul,
And was told that I
Would have second sight,
But this was a lie.

Had I been so astute
I'd have turned and fled
From the mandrake root
That I kept instead.

—Mary Austin

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A spiteful fakir of Bombay, a long-suffering Englishman, and the hard-to-talk-down, always resourceful, Murchison Morks.

THE DEVIL'S GARDEN

by Robert Arthur

"IN CALCUTTA I SAW THE MOST amazing sight," said Henderson, the stout paint manufacturer who is a member of our club. He had just returned from a world cruise and was telling about it in detail. "I saw a Hindu fakir, naked except for a loin cloth, lying on a bed of sharpened nails with a fifty-pound rock on his chest, and never even murmuring! He—"

"In Bombay," a melancholy voice interrupted him, "I saw a sight much stranger than that."

Henderson turned a little purple. It was Morks who had interrupted. Murchison Morks his full name is.

"This fakir, I say," Henderson went on, raising his voice, "was lying on needle-sharp nails with this rock on his chest. Then two assistants got up on the rock and began to jump up and down!"

"The fakir that I saw, in Bombay," Murchison Morks interposed, "was sitting in a little garden, surrounded by toads, snakes, lizards, rats, and filth indescribable. From time to time he took a long sharp pin and stuck it completely through his hand, his foot, his arm, his leg, deep into the flesh of his thigh, and other portions of his anatomy.

"Every time he did it, he laughed. And every time he laughed, I saw another man, a friend of mine, wince with pain as if the pin had gone into *him*."

"And then," Henderson said loudly, "just when I thought nothing more could—"

"I learned later,—" Morks' voice had a carrying quality that beat down Henderson's words as if they were the pipings of a child—"that this filthy old man, never stirring out of his garden of muck, or from among his nest of snakes and rodents and other horrible crawling creatures, had killed at least three men—white men, I mean—just as he meant to kill my friend. By sticking pins into himself, pouring slime upon himself, and by stroking, fondling, and otherwise touching his dreadful pets."

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Henderson let out a deep breath. His face was furious, but he saw it was no use. Morks had gotten the attention of all the club members within earshot. When he was sure of that, he let himself sink into a large, well-padded chair, absently picked up a drink that had been left there for someone else, and surveyed us, his long solemn face sober.

"But I know you won't believe me unless I tell you the whole story," he murmured deprecatingly, "so—"

The story does not start in Bombay, though, (Morks began). At least, my part of it doesn't, and I'm only going to tell you the part I know about for myself, since that is the only one I can vouch for as being unquestionably true.

My share of the story begins half around the world from India, in the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of Surrey, England. Where I was visiting an old friend of mine, John Paget, recently succeeded to the title of Earl of Quimberly, and engaged to Lucy Horrocks, one of the loveliest girls ever to have an income of twenty thousand a year in her own name.

Being in London, I had dropped down to see Jack Paget for just a weekend. But finding him nervous and distraught, not at all his old self, I determined to remain until I could discover what was wrong. For that something was, was evident.

It was several years since I had seen Jack. On the occasion of our last meeting, he had been a bronzed, powerful young fellow, a little over-tense, perhaps, but as fine a specimen as England was ever likely to turn out.

Now, just when he should have been bubbling over with happiness at the prospect of marrying Lucy and restoring the family estates to their old glory, he was pale and wan, jumpy as a nervous old woman, his eyes sunken and haunted. He was given, too, to starting unexpectedly and violently—a gesture he tried to check, but never could.

It was only after an incident happening on the third day of my visit that he broke down and told me what lay behind the change that had come over him.

We were having a spot of tea in the library of ancient Quimberly Hall and Jack was adding a dash of soda to mine when his hand jerked, he dropped the siphon, and involuntarily he clapped his wrist to his mouth.

Then, pale and shaking, he tried to murmur something about nerves, but I knew better. I made him hold out his hand. There was a tiny puncture on his wrist, from which a drop of blood was oozing. Exactly as if a pin had jabbed him. An invisible pin wielded by unseen hands.

And looking closely, I saw half a dozen marks that represented

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similar pricks, healed or healing.

For one wild instant I suspected him of having become a dope fiend. But common sense quickly told me, whatever was wrong with Jack it was not that. For he had actually been squirting the soda into my glass when the pin prick —if that was what it was—occurred. And there had been nothing to cause it. Nothing whatever.

Sheepishly, when he saw that I had noticed the other marks, Paget showed me his left hand. It was marked in the same way.

"I'm covered with them from head to foot," he told me then, huskily, the look in his eyes that of a hunted animal. "I've been to a doctor. Harley Street chap. Told him about it. He thought I was dotty. I could tell by his face. Thought I was one of these fellows who stick things in themselves for the fun of it. Listened to me with a straight face, and then gave me some nerve tonic. Nerve tonic!"

He laughed bitterly.

"As if I was imagining—these."

Well, to shorten the story, I dragged all the facts out of Jack without more nonsense. They were scanty enough. It seemed that he had gotten back from India only about six months before. When his uncle died, leaving the title to him, he had been working in Bombay in a bank. He'd chucked the job up to come back and be Earl of Quimberly, and this—well, this thing that was happening to him had begun the day he stepped off the boat.

Since then, day and night, he had suffered at unexpected moments from these pin pricks—*these invisible, unseen pin pricks* coming any place, without any warning whatever. Real pin pricks that drew blood. Like the one I had seen. And hurt. Naturally.

"But it's not that," Jack told me, his face drawn. "I mean, being stuck by a pin isn't pleasant, but it doesn't hurt that much. If you told me I was going to have one jabbed into me a dozen times a day, at regular intervals, I wouldn't mind it so much. Not fun, of course, but a man could stand it. It—it's the never *knowing*."

His lips twitched and his eyes were appealing.

"I mean, aside from never daring tell anybody you're being stuck with pins that don't exist, by some force that can't be seen—and the wondering what it *is* that's after you, of course—aside from that, it's the uncertainty.

"I get up, I eat, I tend to business, I talk to people, I go to bed —and I never know but that the next instant *it* is going to happen. I can't help jumping when it does, and of course people notice. And I can't explain.

"All the time I'm tight as a spring, waiting for it, eternally waiting for the next time. Can't let myself go, can't forget myself,

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can't put my mind on anything else. Can't even talk coherently to Lucy—old Horrocks is beginning to wonder if I'm not a bit off. Can't blame him. I wonder myself.

"The Lord knows I'm not sleeping, and I can't eat, and—well, if it doesn't stop soon, I *will* be crazy. There've been times already when I was so edgy I wanted to jump off a high building."

He passed his hand over his forehead and took the drink I handed him. Of course I could see what he was getting at. After all, when one is likely to have an invisible pin jabbed into one any minute of the day or night, a man is bound to get jumpy and overstrung.

And Jack was getting worse, I could see. Unless I was able to help, something desperate might happen. That remark about wanting to jump off a high building wasn't like Jack. Not in the slightest. But I confess I was baffled. I didn't begin to understand until Jack's next remark.

"And the queer thing," he said, having finished off the drink (Morks did likewise), "is that every time it happens, a picture comes into my mind. A beastly, sickening picture I'd give a lot to be able to forget completely. But I can't. It keeps coming back, and every pin prick recalls it to me.

"It's a picture of an old fakir I saw in Bombay, just the day I was sailing for home. I was wandering around in the native section, looking for a present for Lucy, when I got somehow into a little alley that led into a kind of square, where a low wall marked off a garden.

"At least, I suppose you could call it a garden. Plants grew in it—sickly, vicious looking plants that had their roots in slime and muck inches deep. The stench was enough to gag a man, and even the natives who used the alley went by quickly, with their noses up. And they weren't the fastidious kind, those natives.

"But worst of all was the chap sitting in the middle of the garden, on a low rock. A fakir he was, I suppose, making his living by begging. Anyway, he had a brass bowl, and I noticed that the natives who passed, even if they did hurry, never missed tossing something into the bowl.

"But I didn't see the bowl at first. Because, although it turned my stomach to look at him, I couldn't take my eyes off this beggar in the middle of his diabolical garden. He was a wizened old scarecrow, wrinkled like a wadded-up glove. His eyes were just gleams of blackness behind half-slitted lids. He was quite bald, and wore nothing but a rag around his middle.

"And in the garden with him he had—pets. Rats! Lizards! Snakes!

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Toads! All of them crawling and writhing and hopping around in the muck and slime that surrounded him.

"From time to time he would reach out and pick up one of the rats, or a snake, or a toad, and fondle it. Sometimes he'd stick out a bare foot and let it rest on the wriggling back of a serpent, or on the warty, wet, cold skin of a toad. Occasionally he'd pick up one of the cobras and let it wriggle across his thighs, or his stomach, or one of the rats would scamper over his legs.

"When he wasn't doing that, he was paddling his hands and feet around in the muck about him, splashing it onto his body and letting it harden there, to add another layer to a crust that must have been inches thick.

"But his final trick, and the one that was too much for me, was to take pins and stick them into himself—into his arms, his legs, his hands, his feet, his thighs. And laughing when he did it! Grinning at me with toothless gums exposed.

"Of course, I've seen fakirs drive pins and needles into themselves before. Who in India hasn't? But never as if they enjoyed it. Never with the rare and hellish relish this old devil got out of it.

"Then, while I stood there, gagging but unable to tear my gaze away, the chap lifted his bowl suggestively, inviting a contribution. I was going to give him something, just to get away, but I couldn't. I was too ill. I tottered a little ways off and—well, I *was* sick.

"As soon as that was over, I fled for clean air, feeling his eyes jabbing into my back like burning glasses. But I couldn't do anything else. It wasn't until my ship was well at sea that I was able to get the stench out of my nostrils.

"And now"—Paget wiped his forehead—"whenever *it* happens, there I see the old fakir again, sitting in his garden of filth, making a pin cushion out of himself. And that's almost worse than the being stuck part. Tell me, Morks—do you think I *am* off my head?"

Well, I told him he wasn't. Far from it. For the time being, I contented myself with saying that something very real and substantial lay behind what was happening to him. And I added that if he could only stick it out a few days longer, I wanted to run up to London to have a talk with a man I knew there, who was rather an expert on matters like this.

He took heart, and in the morning his chauffeur drove me to London.

I didn't go to Harley Street, though. I went to Soho. Soho, you konw, is in the slums. Near the docks. And there, in a dark little room overlooking a smelly stretch of water, I saw the man I had in mind.

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I put Jack's story up to him, and he nodded as I told him my conclusions. "I know the man," this friend of mine said. "He has killed many. Of white men, at least three whom I knew myself, or knew of.

"One was an English lord, a man of the utmost cleanliness. The slightest disarray of his clothing, or the faintest soiling of his person, was unbearable. He also viewed this fakir whom your friend saw and unfortunately failed to give money to.

"The filth of the scene nauseated him. He likewise hurried off, failing to make a contribution to the begging bowl.

"He was making a cruise about the world at that time. Scarcely had he reached his ship before he began to feel distressed. He had the sensation that his body was unwashed, as if he had not bathed. He bathed, in hot water, and donned fresh clothing.

"An hour later, at dinner, again the feeling of being unwashed came over him. He struggled against it, but in the end could not help bathing once again, and again changing his clothes. To no avail. The sense of having dirt adhering to his body and hands, even to his face and hair, persisted.

"He tried to ignore it. It became worse, until he was half beside himself. Finally he consulted the ship's doctor. The doctor suggested that he had a touch of the sun, and prescribed sedatives. They helped for a time, but when the effect wore off, the sensation of being dirty returned. The unfortunate man struggled against it as long as he could. In time, however, it became an obsession that quite undermined his self control, and before the boat docked once more in London, he threw himself overboard.

"The second whom I knew," he said, "was an American, a countryman of yours, but not fond of beggars. He stumbled upon this same fakir, and turned aside his eyes, refusing baksheesh.

"A short time later, he began to be troubled in the night by sensations of unseen creatures, some soft-furred, some scaly, some cold and damp, running across his legs. He would wake up and feel the scaly dryness of a snake upon his skin. Or the furry body of a rat would scamper across his chest.

"I need not say, there was nothing there at any time. He began to have a horror of the night time, and of the necessity for sleeping. He tried sleeping by day, and still suffered. In the end, the unnerving horror of forever touching unseen and revolting creatures drove him to madness. He was killed while trying to escape from them in an asylum.

"The third"—and my friend shrugged, "his story is similar. Except that he, unexpectedly, would feel that he had just stepped in his

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bare feet into a puddle of slime. Or had placed his hand in one. Or at night, as he tried to sleep, would be overcome by the sensation that he was lying in mud and water.

"He too sought relief from the doctors, and he too was told nerves. In the end, he too killed himself. With a revolver. Your friend's case is not different, save that he feels himself pricked by pins. He too will either go mad in the end, or kill himself to escape madness. There is nothing that can be done."

My friend shrugged, in the fatalistic manner of the Easterner, but I was not to be discouraged so easily.

"You mean there's no way to fight this thing?" I asked.

My friend shook his head.

"There is none. It is a matter between the man Paget and the one in Bombay. No one else may intervene. If the man Paget were a priest, or a fakir too, he could work an equal spell upon the one in Bombay and force a truce. As he is not, he is doomed. Unless he kills that one—which might be dangerous, even if he would do it."

"Jack wouldn't kill anyone," I told him, vexed. "And he certainly isn't a priest. But I'm going to get him out of this devil's grip somehow, by hook or crook!"

My friend refilled my glass and after I had drained it, my brain began to hum and buzz a bit.

"Listen!" I exclaimed. "From what I know of these things, they aren't strictly one-way propositions, are they? I mean, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander?"

My friend agreed.

"That is true," he told me. "But the Holy One is inured by long years of self control to all sensations. There is nothing that anyone could do that would disturb him."

I wasn't so sure about that, but I had learned what I wanted, and already a scheme was forming in my mind. So I said goodbye, and hurried back to Quimberly Hall.

I found Jack all in a stew, waiting for me with the pathetic hopefulness of a small boy expecting a present, but dreading he wouldn't get it. I didn't promise anything definite, but intimated that I had hopes I could help matters a bit, anyway. Then I ordered him into the highest, stiffest, tightest standup starched collar that could be procured.

The one we finally dug out was a relic of the nineties, and had a true saw-tooth edge. Jack kicked like a wild horse at putting it on, but I was adamant. In the end he wore it, although I must admit the staff of servants looked at him very strangely, and hurried out of his way whenever he ventured out of his rooms for a stroll.

Hopefully then I waited. Jack

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suffered, of course, especially since I made him wear the collar both night and day, even to bed. But he was an Englishman, and he stood the ordeal well. It would have killed a man of any other nationality, I'm sure.

And for a time it worked. There were a few pin pricks the day he put the collar on, but they ceased rather abruptly. The next day there were a couple more, of a tentative nature. Then for several days they ceased altogether.

I was jubilant, and Jack actually was beginning to eat heartily again, when the great disappointment came. He began to be jabbed by the invisible pins twice as savagely as before—as if the force at work were getting even with him for something.

And before I had concocted another plan, he was almost out of his mind.

But I never count too much on the first idea working, and I always try to have an alternative if it doesn't. In this case I was as resourceful as ever.

"Jack," I asked, after long thought, "what kind of fakir did you say this chap in Bombay was? Hindu? Moslem? Sikh? Buddhist?"

"Moslem," he groaned. "What am I going to do, Morks? In heaven's name, what?"

"I'll tell you what you're going to do!" I asserted with decision. "You're going to get packed. We've got to go to India."

Three days later we were in Bombay. The Empire Airways service got us there. We skimmed above thousands of miles of sea and mountain and jungle, but I hardly noticed it. Jack was too miserable to pay much attention to scenery either. I was still making him wear the high collar, which attracted a lot of attention from the other passengers. And he was worrying about the contents of the valise he was carrying.

The valise had a pet in it, a mascot I had bought for Jack in London.

"You'll probably be leading it around on a leash wherever you go for a good many years to come," I told him, "and so you might as well have a trained one. Besides, that way it'll be easier to explain to Lucy why you have to keep it in the bedroom with you nights."

"Easier!" Jack choked—for the collar was tighter than ever. "*Easier!* To explain to Lucy why—"

Then he had to stop to get his breath. With that collar on, he couldn't speak more than a couple of words at a time. But it was working. It had gained us a couple of days respite again. But of course I couldn't go on indefinitely, making him wear a collar tighter and ever tighter, for eventually he would have strangled. So I was pinning a lot of hope on this trip.

We reached Bombay in midmorning. Before noon we had set

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out to find that fakir squatting in his puddle of slime, surrounded by his toads and rats and serpents.

Jack still did not know why we had come, and I had not explained, knowing that his English resistance to new ideas would have made it impossible for him to believe me, and might have made him refuse to coöperate.

We had to search most of the afternoon, but in the end we found the fellow, by bribing a naked street boy two cents to take us to him. The boy led us there and fled. And the ancient fakir in his nauseous garden looked up, met Jack Paget's eye, and smiled hideously.

Then he deliberately took up a long pin and jabbed it into the flesh of his wrist.

Beside me, Jack winced, and almost dropped the valise. I saw a spot of blood ooze out on his wrist, at the exact point where the beggar had jabbed himself.

Still grinning, the old devil took half a dozen more pins, and one by one thrust them into his own flesh.

And every time he did it, Jack winced and jumped, and the blood oozed at the same spot on his body.

It was the old fakir's vengeance on him, of course, for failing to pay him his baksheesh. And it was horribly effective—effective and simple. It was what I had suspected when I went to my friend in Soho, and though I had guessed how it worked, in general, he confirmed my guess.

I don't know the mechanics behind it, but in some way the old beggar was able to establish a psychic twinship with anybody he wished evil to. You've all read how when one of the two twins becomes ill, the other often gets sick too, though miles away? It was something like that. Except that in this instance the fakir was able to make his victims feel exactly what he was feeling at the moment he put himself in contact with them.

You might say he managed to broadcast his own sensations, and forced his subjects to pick them up and feel them too. There was more to it, of course, and that's putting it very roughly, but that gives you an idea of how the thing worked.

So there he had been in Bombay, all these months, occasionally remembering Paget and getting in tune with him as he stuck a pin into himself. With the result that Jack, thousands of miles away, winced and jumped and was slowly going mad until I came along.

That was how he had operated on the other chaps, too, naturally, that my friend had told me about. He had intuitively known their own special weaknesses, and had played upon them.

Of course, he was inured to it.

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But you can perhaps get the feelings of his victims just by imagining . . .

Now, as we faced him, he was sticking pins into himself, and Jack was wincing at their thrust. But as I had learned, it wasn't all one-sided. If he made Jack feel what he was feeling, he felt what Jack was feeling too. You follow me? If Jack had thrust a pin into *his* arm then, the old fakir would have felt it also. Tit for tat. Only he wouldn't have minded, and Jack did.

Now you begin to see why I made Jack wear the high collar. If there is anything civilization has perfected more uncomfortable than a high starched collar with a sawtooth edge, I don't know what it is. And if anything could make the hideous old beggar stop and think twice, I reasoned, it would be the sensation of wearing a high collar, much too tight, that he would get from Jack every time he set out to torment him.

Well, as you know, it had worked for a while. Now, every time he stuck himself, the old fakir's eyes popped out a little and the smile he wore faded, as if he was being half-strangled by an unseen collar about his scrawny throat. But he was game. He could take punishment. He was used to being uncomfortable, and he would last a lot longer than Jack could.

So now, before Jack had more than realized what was happening, I played our trump card. "Open the valise, Jack," I ordered coolly. "Take Elsie up in your arms and pet her."

Elsie was the mascot I had bought in London. Jack obeyed mechanically. He opened the valise and lifted Elsie out. Elsie was white and clean and very cute. She was highly trained, and could walk on her hind legs, spell out her name, and turn somersaults. I had become much attached to her, but for some reason Jack couldn't seem to share my fondness. However, he obeyed orders. He held Elsie tightly in his arms and stroked her.

And then I knew we had won. That old beggar stopped abruptly in the very act of driving home a pin into his thigh. He shuddered and flung out his arms. He paddled his hands frantically in the muck, as if to remove the sensation he was getting from Jack of stroking Elsie.

He gagged, and gobbled something to himself, and then fell over backward getting off his rock. He gurgled something frightful at us, and I leaned over the low fence that held his toads and snakes penned in.

"See?" I asked. "And remember, if there's any more monkey business, my friend is simply going to pick her up and pet her. And you'll feel her. Every time you try to torment him with your infernal pins, *you'll* feel *her*."

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I don't know if the old wretch understood or not, but howling, he dashed into his hut—the first time in twenty years he'd gone inside, I heard later. And carrying Elsie, Jack marched off with me in triumph. Nor was he ever bothered again by those invisible pins, I can inform you.

Although, otherwise, there was one little hitch. Lucy Horrocks broke off their engagement, and he finally married a nice little girl from somewhere in Sussex, who didn't object so strenuously to the idea of Elsie going every place with them on leash, as well as sharing their bedroom nights.

Morks, finished, looked about him with a searching eye. Silence followed the conclusion of his tale—a silence that Henderson's voice broke brutally.

"And just what was this Elsie whose touch, even at second hand, gave the old fakir such a case of jitters?" he demanded in a grating tone. "That's something you've neglected to tell us."

"Oh, have I!" Morks asked innocently. "Well, of course, I thought you'd guessed. You see, the old fakir was a Moslem, very strict and devout, and though rats and snakes were all right with him, Elsie was quite another story. Elsie was a very pretty little—at least, I certainly thought so—trained pig.

"Did I hear someone suggest another drink?"

To Give Them Beauty for Ashes

Burnt by a bomb in dissolving slaughter,
Evolving some, was Eve's strange daughter.
Adam's child by a boiling sea
Toiled with a wild
Fecundity.

Face-shape squared with four new graces;
Skin-shade faded from five old races.
Birthday-prone is the breeding Mutie,
Branded with bone-
Destroying beauty.

—Winona McClintic

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In Will Stanton's special vein . . . an hilarious, biting tale of a young druggist from South Dakota, and a mildly unusual sort of New York Cocktail party.

Who Is Going To Cut the Barber's Hair?

by Will Stanton

DERWOOD MILLER WENT INTO THE shed and set the paper bag on the work bench. From it he took the bowl of ice, glass, shaker and olives. The gin and vermouth were in the tool-box. He mixed a cocktail and sat down on a nail-keg to enjoy it. He was a slight, sandy-haired young man with a serious, pleasant expression. With the second drink he began to experience a feeling of mild elation. He lit a cigarette, holding the smoke in his mouth a moment before blowing it out in a casual stream. The effect was the same as if he had inhaled it, but with no damage to the lungs. After a short time he went in the house and sat down to supper with his father and mother. He wasn't concerned about his breath—in Grassy Lawn, S.D., the smell of martinis was not generally recognized.

"Everything go all right today?" Mr. Miller asked. Derwood had a job in the drugstore in town.

"Fine," he said. "My vacation starts tomorrow."

His mother reached over and placed her hand on his. "I'm so happy for you," she said. "Maybe we can do something special this year—drive down to the river maybe. I could pack a picnic basket."

"The picnic basket is out," her husband said. "We broke the handle on it last year."

Mrs. Miller looked disappointed.

"Never mind," Derwood told her, "I'm going to New York."

Mr. Miller helped himself to the fried potatoes. He appeared doubtful. "You don't think you'd rather wait until you're older?"

"I've been planning this for a long time," Derwood said, "I've bought my ticket."

"I see. Well, you don't want to miss the Flatiron Building. They tell me it's well worth seeing."

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"I will if I can," he said. "I don't know how much time I'll have."

"Have some more fried potatoes," his father said. "We're just simple farming people, but I have a little money put aside—"

"Your grandfather was in New York once," Mrs. Miller said. "He never wanted to talk about it."

"I have to go up now and pack my bag." Derwood excused himself and went to his room. On the dresser was a small dictionary of foreign words and phrases. He leafed through it. *Ad Astra Per Aspera, Sub Rosa,* and the rest—he knew them well.

Derwood's father had frequently regretted his failure to study Latin while in school, and had determined his son would not make the same mistake. But when Derwood got to high school the superintendent was leaning less toward Latin and more toward domestic relations and volleyball.

Derwood made it up to his father as best he could by learning a good number of foreign sayings. Such as, *Si quaeris peninsulam amoenam, circumspice.* This is the motto of Michigan. Derwood was as loyal to S.D. as it was possible for a healthy young man to be, but these words seemed to pass beyond the bounds of local patriotism.

"It may never put any money in your pocket," his father was fond of saying, "but Latin is something that will never stand you in bad stead." And so it was. Derwood would frequently look about him and although he seldom saw a beautiful peninsula, the expression helped him more fully to appreciate the beauties that were there, if there happened to be any. He put the dictionary in his valise with some undershirts and drawers, as his mother appeared.

"We don't have much of worldly goods," she said, "but there's that stock that Papa left me. You know things are awfully dear in New York City."

"I've made allowances for that." He put three pairs of cotton socks in the valise and three pairs of woolen socks. When he looked up his father was standing in the doorway.

"I don't know that your suit is going to be in fashion when you get to the city," he said. "We've never held with spending much money for show, but there's the property from your Uncle Avery's estate."

"I'll wear my regular suit," Derwood said. He put in an extra necktie and some handkerchiefs and closed the valise. "I'm catching the 9:15 in the morning."

"You'll always have a home here with us," his father said.

Derwood sat down on the bed and started taking off his shoes. "I know it," he said.

He had ridden trains before but not as far as New York. He took a

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seat by the window. There was nothing to be nervous about—many persons had gone to New York before and come home safely. He had studied the route and was confident that the tracks were in good condition all the way. When the train pulled into Grand Central Station, he was calm.

His contact was awaiting him and they proceeded to the YMCA where reservations had been made. As they entered the room, Derwood stopped short. Sitting by the bed was another Derwood.

The Contact pushed him into the room and closed the door. "I'm afraid you may find this a little strange," he said.

"Well," said Derwood, "I didn't expect New York to be the same as back home."

"When you placed your ad in the *Saturday Review* requesting an invitation to a cocktail party, I was greatly interested." The Contact stepped to the window and pulled down the shade. "To you it represented a happy new experience. To me and to my race it might mean new life for a dying civilization."

Derwood thought for a moment. "Well," he said, "anything I can do to help—"

"Thank you. When you return to your home this episode will be erased from your memory. But for the moment we must explain to you what is happening. That is the law of our Mother planet."

Derwood nodded. His family had been on the side of law and order ever since he could remember.

"It isn't important where we are from," the Contact continued, "so long as you understand that we have long ago solved all technical and social problems. We are impervious to outside attack and have overcome disease, poverty, and unhappiness. Our culture is the richest in the galaxy. However, it has been over 800 centuries since anyone of our race has written a story or painted a picture.

"Here on earth you have famine and injustice, and every sin flourishes—yet your housewives create statuary, your prisoners compose songs and your taxi drivers write poems. Our most exhaustive studies of your behavior patterns fail to account for this phenomenon. It is now believed that only by observing your civilization from inside can we gain the information we seek. For this reason, our agent here was sent to South Dakota to observe your normal way of life. As a result he has been able to assume not only your appearance and manner, but also your memories, attitudes and opinions. When he attends this party in your place, all of the famous creative people will appear to him through your eyes—on your level of understanding. And now Derwood—"

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The false Derwood nodded and stepped out the door. He walked to the address and took the elevator to the top floor.

He had never seen a penthouse apartment before but he was not over-awed. He stepped down into the living room and mingled with the guests. Walking among them, he was aware of a nicety of action—an elation of tone which impressed him. People who happened to drop their glasses didn't even look down and they spoke of nothing that was not cultural or imported or expensive. The cheapest thing he heard mentioned was an Oldsmobile and that was tossed off lightly. To a chap from Grassy Lawn, S.D., this was heady stuff.

He moved thoughtfully from group to group, saying nothing until a slender, intense young man tapped him on the shoulder. "You're from out of town," he said. It was not a question. It was not a statement either, but something else—an indictment of society perhaps. "My name," he said, "is Rolland Borsdale Causewell the goddam IV. Or something like that. I've been going to cocktail parties since I was fourteen."

Derwood considered introducing himself, but Causewell went on talking. "Some evening, you know, when you were small, you got out of bed and sneaked down to the stair landing and looked through the spindles. There was the ice and the glasses and the ladies in their pretty dresses for chrissake, and the men that get their pictures in the paper, and all of a sudden you knew. This was bigger than an overnight hike—bigger than a motorscooter of your own." He took a swallow of his drink and looked sideways at Derwood. "Right?"

"My parents didn't entertain. Mostly I read about it. In books."

"In books. I see," Causewell nodded. "You must have had a library card."

"I have a number of books of my own," Derwood said, "Fitzgerald, Wakeman, Marquand, Ilka Chase—"

"You don't need any library card—you could issue your own. You could even start a Not Especially Great Books Club."

Derwood picked up his glass. "It's been interesting talking to you."

"The washroom is at the end of the hall," Causewell said. His shoulders shook as though he were laughing, but his mouth was bitter.

Derwood stepped onto the terrace and sat down on a bench. Behind him, on the other side of a hedge, a couple were arguing. "How would you know how a woman feels?" the man was saying, "You aren't a woman. Behind that lovely face is an adding machine."

"No it isn't," she said.

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"Instead of a heart full of warmth and tenderness and things like that, you've got a cash register—" His voice sounded a great deal like Spencer Tracy's.

"You think I'm not a woman?" her voice was dangerously soft. "Suppose I prove it."

"No." From the sound it was apparent he was shaking his head slowly. "It's a little late to prove it to me."

"The hell with you," she said, "I'm going to prove it to him'." And she reached through the hedge and grabbed Derwood by the necktie. He broke away and walked toward the lavatory.

He was about to open the door at the end of the hall when he noticed another door just beyond it. A tiny door. He opened that one and stepped inside. A man was sitting behind a desk. "Sit down," the man said.

There was something familiar about the man—he might have been almost anyone—the Wandering Jew—Johnnie Appleseed. "You may call me Mr. Smith," the man said in a tone of tired wisdom no longer in demand. "I have been known by many names in many lands."

"I guess that is your business."

"Many things are my business," he said watching half humorously for Derwood's response. When none was forthcoming, he held his watch up to his ear, shaking it. "I have lived in many lands."

"Lots of pretty country around there."

"Oh?" Mr. Smith looked at him. "Around where?"

"Almost any place," Derwood said, "*Si Quaeris peninsulam amoenam—*"

"Yes, I have known many like you," Mr. Smith said, "in Alexandria, in Rome—young men eager to try their wings."

"I came here to go to a cocktail party," Derwood said. "I put an ad in the *Saturday Review*."

"Excellent. The British have their country weekends and Holland its canals. Troy had a wooden horse, as I recall, but even so—" He tapped his watch thoughtfully on the desk.

"I had saved up some money," Derwood said.

"Quite so." Mr. Smith glanced briskly at his watch and put it in his pocket. "In this country you have the cocktail party. Civilization has nothing finer."

Derwood went back to the living room. Causewell was talking with a stout chap named Oliver and a heavy-lidded blond named Gerda.

Oliver shook hands. "They tell me you have intellectual tendencies," he said softly. He looked sharply all around. "You'd better talk to Gerda—she's one of them. She sends out the monthly underground bulletin."

"I see?" Derwood said.

"The special this month is Bach.

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It could have been Frank Lloyd Wright, but no. This month, Bach. You don't have to listen to him as long as you agree he's best. Next month maybe Pirandello."

"You don't hear a lot of Bach in South Dakota," Derwood said.

Gerda nodded. "That's what I keep telling people."

"You take Krazy Kat and Fred Allen and you can't go wrong," Oliver continued. "Or Bix Beiderbecke. To the intellectual, these pastures are ever green.

"Verdant," said Gerda.

"Exactly. This all goes back to the days when you had agnostics and free love." Oliver shook his head. "Not any more. They have big families now—planned of course—and sing in the choir. They tell their children about sex, but there's no real interest—no sharing. The parents sit around discussing traumatic experiences and toilet training while the kids kick over the gin-and-tonic and spill ash trays in the hi-fi."

"These intellectuals you mention," Derwood said. "You don't include yourself?"

"I vote for the man and not the party," Oliver said. "Who can judge the intellectual?"

"*Quis custodiet,*" Derwood said, "*ipsos custodes?*" He waited a moment and added in English, "Who shall keep the keepers themselves?"

"Yes," said Oliver, "who is going to show the guide where to get off at? There's no place for nonconformists anymore. If they hope to survive, they've got to organize."

Derwood backed away. "It's been nice talking to you—" Gerda stepped on his foot.

"Not so fast," she said, "Buster. Don't start anything you can't finish."

"I didn't know I had started anything."

"Naturally." Gerda stood there with a drink in her hand, swaying gently. "That's what Mrs. O'Leary said. And Nero."

"They did?"

"And that Russian soldier," she said, "back in 1812. 'Honest, I just wanted to warm my hands, Captain, and the next thing I knew, Moscow was gone.'"

"I don't believe it was 1812," Derwood said.

"Oh to hell with it." Gerda turned away. "Just ask yourself this—who is going to shrink the analyst's head?" Derwood walked all the way down the hall without thinking of an answer.

He found Mr. Smith polishing his spectacles with bathroom tissue. "How do you do?" Mr. Smith said, stuffing paper into his pockets. "Always interested in new faces."

"We have met," Derwood said.

"It is my purpose to guide the wandering ones Mr.—" he looked at Derwood vaguely— "but names are not important; I have been

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known by many. You may call me George Spelvin, if you wish."

"I've been meeting interesting people," Derwood said; "some junior executives. They were singing the Whiffenpoof Song, most of them."

"Splendid fellows," said Mr. Smith. "I'm glad they could make it. The life of any cocktail party. Spain has its tulips—"

"Holland," Derwood said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said Holland has tulips."

"Yes," said Mr. Smith, "no quarrel on that score. Not to mention the canals—more canals than you might suppose. Too many, I sometimes think."

Derwood shifted slightly in his chair. "There was a girl I talked to who lives in the park—Central Park—sleeping in grass and leaves."

Mr. Smith nodded. "They stray from their cradles when they are small—in London, in Carthage—and they can never rest. They roam the dark streets seeking what they can never find."

"She mentioned that she had lost something," Derwood said, "So I told her to ask the fellows from Yale."

"Yes, they might know. Splendid chaps each and every one, and eager to help," said Mr. Smith. "Baa, baa, baa." He shuffled his desk equipment around thoughtfully. "Yes, I have lived in many lands," he began . . .

"It's been a real pleasure, Mr. Smith."

"You may call me the Ghost of Christmas Past," he said.

Derwood did. In the hallway he ran into Gerda.

She lifted her gaze to the top button of his vest. "Who is going to call the umpire out?" she asked.

"*Vox populi, vox Dei*," he said. He went onto the terrace.

A young man with a black hat was sitting on the edge of the wall. At his feet was a girl with rings in her ears. An old man was standing by. "When you are young," the old man said, "you must drink to forget. When you are old you drink and you forget but they are separate. This is natural. This is the only true forgetfulness. All else is sham."

"You are a fool," said the young man. "I have nothing to forget." He handed his empty glass to the girl. "Bring me wine, Marlene."

"I am Carmen," she said. "Marlene was lost in Seville, don't you remember—on the ferris wheel?"

"I remember what I choose," he said. "The victory and the despair and the loving. They are only words. You can find them in any dictionary."

"Any English dictionary," Derwood said.

The young man turned and looked at him. In his eyes was the knowingness of those who daily look upon the face of death—the racing driver, the animal trainer—

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the mortician. "Pinon was a fool," he said, "but he was brave. He flew the fighting plane into the morning sun."

"Ay, over the ocean he flew it," the old one said. "Seventy kilometers out to sea."

"Ay," said the young man, "And when the petrol was gone he turned back. He tried to reach the shore on courage alone, but it was too far." He fell silent for a moment. "He had the courage of a water buffalo, but it was not enough."

"There was a head wind," said the old one. "I tried to pray for him, but I could not."

"And I—I tried to sleep but I could not. For 32 nights I could not sleep."

"You slept in the daytime," Carmen said.

"I tried to drink wine," said the young one. "Wine from the grapes of Guernovoca with the taste of the sun in them, but the wine caught in my throat."

"There were pieces of cork in the bottle," Carmen said.

The young man turned and stared at her without expression. Afterwards he turned away. "In the end there was nothing left but courage," he said, "and courage was not enough. I thought to play my guitar, but there was no music in it."

"Pinon took your guitar with him," Carmen said.

Derwood went inside. He moved with the natural grace one comes to associate with druggists from South Dakota.

Causewell stepped up to him waving a drink. "Going down the hall again?" he asked. "You seem to spend a lot of time freshening up. It's a long walk down to the last door."

"I don't mind walking," Derwood said, "I was raised on a farm."

Causewell stood swaying in front of him—measuring him. "You were born on a farm—you should know about life—you should know about the killers."

"I suppose so," Derwood said. He was standing there, shuffling his feet. He groped for a foreign phrase, but none occurred. "The killers?"

"They start while you're young," Causewell said. "The first thing they kill is the Easter Rabbit and the fairies that give you money for loose teeth. Then they kill Tom Swift. They take away everything you've ever cared about. Even the poor old duck at the end of the corridor. They put an exploding transistor in his hearing-aid."

"People at parties," Derwood said, "They do things they wouldn't ordinarily."

Causewell looked at him pityingly. "You haven't tumbled yet? All the phony conversation and the bogus characters hired to impress the tourists, and you still believe in cocktail parties?" He

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laughed for the last time. "What made you think they would leave you even one dream? You planned your holiday and you saved your money and came to New York. Well, you learned one thing. There aren't any cocktail parties anymore."

Derwood put down his glass. He had done the things he had meant to do. He had had his hour and it was time to go. He nodded to Causewell and left.

As he emerged from the building an ashtray struck the sidewalk at his feet. There was a note attached to it—from Gerda. "Who is going to haul the janitor's ashes?" it said, and then there was a phone number. Derwood put it in his vest pocket and went back to the YMCA.

A glance assured him that S.R. and the boy from Dakota were gone. He sat down at the table to write his report. It had been centuries since anyone of his race had written a report, but it had been felt that no electronic device could have been able to discover what he had been sent to find. Across the top of the page he wrote—

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS.

With his total recall—his training in sense perception and evaluation, he would have no difficulty in presenting a minute and accurate account of all that had occurred. And yet when his report had been analyzed by the computers and studied by the Council—what would emerge—what germ or spark would be found to bring life to his ancient race?

Sadly he came to realize that it could not be done. No report could reveal the essence of these loving, brawling, sentimental, unreasonable people. No factual account could explain their vitality and their appeal.

He erased the words at the top of the page—there would be no report. Let the Elders make of it what they would—it would have to be done another way. At the top of the page in a firm hand he wrote—

CHAPTER ONE.

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Joanna Russ, a 22-year-old, second-year student at the Yale Drama School writes: "In my senior year in high school, I became a finalist in the Westinghouse Science Talent Search with a study of the growth of fungi (genus Aspergillus*) under light of different wave lengths. I was one of the first ten national winners (Feb., 1953) despite fanatic assertions that I was not a biologist, but a poet. . . . " Evidence of the second assertion is offered herewith. It is Miss Russ's first story—first, we are confident, of many.*

NOR CUSTOM STALE

by Joanna Russ

THEY HAD DISCOVERED IMMORTALity. Oh not for people, not at all; it was Houses that were immortal. Harry and Freda's House had been in their family for fifteen generations. Of course fifteen generations then meant much more than fifteen generations did ten or twelve centuries back, for the Houses, with their atmosphere of protection and their soothing monotony, prolonged people's lives for a good many years. They were proud of their House, for, as the Company always said (after proving to Harry and Freda that their House was in perfect working order), "Our Houses last, not a lifetime, but forever."

The House was attractive and semi-spherical and stood on a little hill, some three or four miles from the highway. On fine days, Freda could walk out on to the hill and watch the cars shooting past, but she usually preferred to watch the artificial scene (of the same thing) as the House showed it to her in the artificial window. One artificial scene she liked especially—that of a little girl in a red dress who ran out on to the highway to pick up her toy sand-pail. Freda often wished that the little girl would raise her head and look into the living-room, a small adjustment for the House to perform on its artificial scene, but of course no one would think of altering any part of a House. The House was perfect. It gave them Air (for all the windows were sealed), it gave them power, and it would let you choose any delicious dish you wanted and then send its electric voice calling and calling to the nearest city to bring it to you. Or if you wanted Food to cook your-

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self, it would make that for you too, from the rock under its own foundation. For there, sunk miles into the earth, was the source of power for the House, a fierce hot dangerous heart that no one must ever come near. It ran everything and chewed up rock to make Air and Food, and powered Harry's Car which was attached to the House down below the level of the ground in a little extension built out from the side of the House. Harry and Freda were not rich people and they had not gotten a Car, a Real Car, until their children had grown up and moved away; you were not wholly comfortable and protected until you had a real Car. With a Self-Powered Car, one actually had to walk in the open air from the Car to the House and then of course one didn't put on one's muffler or one's gloves (for such a *little* walk) and so one got a very bad cold. For Harry and Freda lived in what had been Canada and the winters were very severe. But now they had a Car; Harry could go right from it to the House through the tunnel the House had for that very purpose.

It was the night after Harry's retirement party that something first went wrong. They had all been talking about something scientific that Freda did not understand, with Wilberforce from Harry's job insisting that life meant risk and Harry insisting no, and then Harry saying that the life-lengthening properties of Houses were due to the fact that they never changed.

"Why," he was saying, "Change a person's life and right away *they* have to change. They have to make decisions. They have to age. Thing to do is *not* change, not a particle, not a molecule. And Wilberforce (whom Freda had always thought far too rugged) had gotten angry and shouted that Monotony is Death and Harry had shouted Monotony is Life, so the end of it was they got very angry and Wilberforce said he hoped Harry would have a real dose of Monotony soon to make him see how fast *he'd* age. The guests had been getting into their cars at the extra Car Port in the basement, when Freda noticed what was wrong and came over to her husband, down the basement stairs.

"Harold," she said, "There's something wrong with the House." But Harold was busy telling Wilberforce that Change was Death and the highest human wisdom was to find the perfect moment and live it over and over.

"Harold," said she, but then the guests were gone. They went into the living room and there—as Freda pointed out—there on the Panel set into the wall, there on the Panel that controlled everything in the House, there was a red light shining steadily like a ruby eye.

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"Something is really wrong," said Freda. Harry fetched the House Manual and held it up near the eye, but the eye did not go out. He opened the manual and riffled through it.

"Transport III" he said. "Not serious." (Freda said "oh!" with relief) "Not serious, As any red light on your Panel indicates, there is a small leak in your Fuel line. *Do not start or use your Car.* This is very important. A small leak can be magnified by use of that section of your house until it becomes a large leak, indicated by a green light. Large leaks are highly serious."

Freda and Harry looked at each other. Everyone knew what that meant. Once—and once only—had a family's large leak become serious, but everyone would remember that for the rest of their days. Harry looked grave.

"Freda," he said, "I'm going to disconnect the Car. And you must call the Company."

But when, in an overcoat and muffler, he had shut the car door and pushed the proper buttons, Freda was more upset than before.

"They won't come," she said. "No, Harry, they won't come; they said they have too much business —and not enough help—and besides it's the middle of winter and repairs like that can't be made until spring-time. There was a perfectly impertinent young girl on the phone and she said didn't we think we could live without our Car for a while and besides it was after hours, call back tomorrow."

"Now dear," said Harry, "It's not serious."

"But Harry—"

"Look on it as a vacation, dear. It's not at all serious so long as we don't use the Car. These things take time, and now that I've retired, we can treat it as part of our vacation. Anyway (and he looked smug) "I'm almost glad this happened; I'd love to show old Wilberforce how young you can stay if you don't go ragging your mind to pieces and changing things all over the place! We'll treat every day just like every other day and you'll see how fast time will fly."

So Harry and Freda had a vacation. They watched television, they had the House bring them all the new publications through its mail tubes, and for the first time Freda made the house give her Real Food, Food she could cook herself, instead of ordering meals from a faraway place. The House made the Real Food itself, chewing up the rocks on which it stood and changing them into whatever you asked it to. It was a very happy day. Freda called up a few friends and said that Harry and she were having a vacation and not to call them for that winter because . . . well . . . well, it was a kind of experiment.

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The next morning another red eye had appeared on the Panel.

"Oh, look!" said Freda, annoyed, for she had gotten used to the idea of a small leak and it no longer worried her. "Look, what is it this time?" and while Harry went through the Manual she thought of the scathing things she would say to that young woman at the Company and the stern way she would look into the screen when she called her up.

"It's the phone," Harry said. For a moment he looked troubled. But then he closed the Manual with a snap.

"So much the better for Wilberforce," he said.

"But don't you think I ought to write somebody?" she said. After all, their situation was somewhat isolated and she had just told her friends not to call and—

"No, don't be silly," he said. "We're in a civilized community."

"But don't you think I'd better write them now?" she said.

"Of course not."

"But Harry, suppose the Air goes, or the Heat—"

"Then I'll put on my coat and walk a mile down the road to Wilberforce."

"But Harry, I think I'd better—"

"Oh, write then!" peevishly.

She turned into the kitchen, to dictate to the Mailing Extension, but as she did so, another red light appeared on the Panel. Harry looked through the Manual.

"It's the Mailing Extension," he said. "Now, Freda—" but she just stared at him.

"Oh yes," she said, after a moment, "another of those little lights and it's nothing, but Harry, Harry, I'm worried. Put on your coat and go down the road."

"But it's a mile away," he said (reluctantly, for it was very cold out).

"But darling, suppose the Air is what goes next."

"Darling, if the Air goes, then we'll do what it says in the Manual."

"It says call them up and we don't dare."

"No, it says to open the front door and let some Natural Air in."

"I hate natural Air."

"But Freda—"

"And besides, it's cold out and we'll get cold."

He got up wearily, ready to go; ("Where's my muffler?" he said), but then he suddenly looked determined and sat down again.

"Now dear," he said, "look at it this way. It's not serious."

"Well—"

"It's not serious until there's a green light, which means a Large Leak. And you know them . . . the family who . . . well, *they* lived with a green light for six whole months until— And they simply didn't bother to look it up in their Manual. If anything goes wrong, I'll run down the road to Wilberforce's." He looked gravely

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at his wife. "Freda, don't you trust our House?"

"I think so," she said.

Nothing changed the next day, but there were no more lights on, either. Newspapers arrived. Movies were on call. Freda began to do a book of crossword puzzles. She cooked Real Food in the kitchen, happily glad of the leisure given to her by the House. In the evening she moved from the warm, sunny noon of the kitchen (perfectly imitating real sunlight) to the mellow afternoon of the living room and finally to the soft early evening of the bedroom. The days fell into a pattern—newspapers, books, magazines, movies. Breakfast, then lunch, then dinner in the twilight of the dining room: always twilight, with the artificial windows just darkening into the first clear blue of evening. As Harry wisely pointed out, the House was obviously a good House, since the first trouble (in fifteen generations, too) had occurred in inessentials, in the communications which had really been added on after the house was built, the extra limb of the House so to speak. And, he said, if there were any real trouble like Air or Heat, then of course he would put on his coat and go immediately to the neighbors down the road. Then the Company would rush over, but if the trouble were only incidental, naturally they had a good deal to handle. And fixing Fuel lines was a tricky job; they would naturally want to wait until spring. But of course what Freda had told the young lady at the Company was undoubtedly on file there. Houses, said he fervently, Houses were the greatest thing the genius of man had ever perfected.

It was only a few weeks later (or was it months?) that a fourth eye joined the third—magazines and newspapers stopped coming and they could not use the movies. But as Harry pointed out, the House seemed to be wisely spending its restorative powers (for Houses do repair themselves, to a degree) in keeping its main functions well and fit. Freda could not call for ready-fixed meals, but then did she want to? No. No, no, he would say (shaking his head) they could watch filmed movies instead of broadcast ones, they could eat Real Food for a while; it would not hurt them.

In the morning Freda would get up at exactly 8:30 by the electric clock and make a breakfast consisting of scrambled eggs and real bacon. At 9:30 she would wake up Harry and the two of them would eat breakfast. While the House cleaned the dishes and made the beds, they would do the morning's cross-word puzzle (one apiece) and then read a book until lunch time. At lunch they always had the same menu and at dinner, too (after finishing their books). And

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then after dinner they would watch a filmed motion picture program. And then, at twelve o'clock precisely, they would go to bed. Then the next morning, Freda would get up at exactly 8:30 and the morning after that she would get up at exactly 8:30 and then the next morning . . .

Of course, after a while they had seen all the films and read all the books and it got a little boring. There was nothing to be done but read them and see them over, forgetting when she had read a book before. Every morning after she finished the crossword puzzle, she would erase it; luckily the puzzle was made of synthetic paper and never wore away.

"I really wish," she would say, "that it would be spring soon." (Unfortunately one day Harry had been trying to do something to the electric calendar, and now when you looked at it it always said "March 17.") "I wish," she said, "that it would get warm," though it was warm enough inside the House; very comfortable and warm. Every morning after she finished the cross-word puzzle she erased it and then the next morning she got up at 8:30 precisely and, after breakfast, did it again and erased it again. The days went on; surely it had not been so long since the first ruby appeared on the Panel; and only two strange things interrupted the pleasure of the Allenbury's vacation.

They had made all the windows opaque and projected artificial moving scenes upon them, so they did not notice the young man until he shouted through the speaking tube by the front door to let him in and with him came a great gust of snow and the coldest bitterest air Freda had ever felt. When they asked him if his Car had broken down, he laughed in an idiotic, slack-jawed foolish way and then when he tried to speak to them, they found they could not understand him.

"Did your Car break down?" said Harry, very slowly and carefully, but the stranger only looked bewildered. Finally (whispering to Freda, "I think he must be deaf and dumb"—or maybe he had a cleft palate—), Harry wrote out on a piece of paper, "Did your Car break down?" and to their surprise the stranger wrote "Yes yes" underneath. "He has a cleft palate," whispered Harry.

The stranger drank their Real Food milk, smacking his lips and then ate their doughnuts. When Harry wrote, "Do you have to get to the city?" he wrote below it a great scribble of words, of which every second one seemed to be some kind of slang.

Freda was getting to be afraid of him. Harry wrote on the paper, "I'm afraid it's time to go," and the stranger howled with laughter, hysterically gasping and choking over his milk. But he got up and

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wrote "Thanx" and then below it something that didn't make sense —"blank blank old-fashioned"— only his spelling all along had been much stranger than that, and Harry had to puzzle out every word.

"Old-fashioned?" said Freda, coldly.

"Old-fashioned?" said Harry. "Look here, young man, if we don't know about the newest things, that's only because our House hasn't been working for a couple of months. Believe me, young man, when the Company gets here in the spring—"

This time the young man wrote down "archeological survival"—or at least that's what it seemed—and when Harry angrily tore up the whole paper, the young man gathered his blanket around him and got up. He was wearing something very like a blanket; they supposed he had put it over his clothes to keep warm in the Car. He began to bow, one time after another, till Harry was sorry for tearing up the paper and wrote

"Won't you come and see us in the spring?" at which the young man turned quite white and dashed out the door. Freda sighed in relief when he had gone.

"I really think he was mad, Harry, don't you?" she said. Her husband nodded.

"I don't think he had a thing on except that blanket," he exclaimed. "And did you see his spelling? They don't teach children the way they used to when I was young." He thought for a moment. "Freda, let's make the windows opaque all the time and let's lock the door at night."

Which they did. And for a while, nothing out of the ordinary happened. But then one night:

One night Freda had a bad dream. They had gotten up at the usual time, made breakfast, done the crossword puzzles, read books, and in short gone through the day as usual and were lying in bed asleep, when Freda began to dream. She dreamed she saw a tall man striding through the great snowy forest near the House. He was not like any man she had ever seen, for he was dressed entirely in furs from head to foot, a great tall man with his face almost covered with furs. At his waist he was carrying an electric light that swung back and forth as he walked and lit up first the snow and then the bare trees, the rocks, the snow-laden pine trees among which he walked. The snow was very deep, she dreamed, and packed; he was not walking through it but on it because it was so packed, and he was holding some kind of little instrument in his hand. The instrument chattered; first he turned it one way and when it chattered louder, he went that way. If it chattered less, he went back and turned it an-

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other way. Then Freda dreamed that the little instrument led him to their front door and he began knocking on the door with his heavy, fur-gloved fist, pounding on the front door and shouting. He tried to batter open the front door but it was sealed for the night, and he could not shout through the Communications tube because the House was too efficient to open the Communications tube to the cold night air. His heavy fists pounded on the door, great bruising blows, trying to wake up the people inside, and Freda dreamed that he was shouting to her, something terrible about time, too much time, not enough time. She woke up.

"Harry," she gasped, "Harry, there's a man outside." He turned over in bed.

"There's a man," she said. "A pounding on the door. And he's saying something terrible about how we must go away."

"Wha'?" said Harry sleepily.

"There's a man," she repeated, "Outside, all in fur, a huge big man who wants us to open the door."

"You're dreaming," her husband said, and certainly it seemed like it when she looked around the bedroom. The pink-shaded lamp cast its light up to the ceiling, the cozy, familiar furniture stood in its usual places. The room was warm and quiet (absolutely soundproof, in fact) and covered with a thick, luxurious rug (which renewed its own nap.) Certainly there could be no man outside, and yet Freda almost thought she still heard the faraway vibration of blows . . .

"Harry," she said, her voice shaking, "He was saying something terrible, something about it was too late and we must all go away."

"Where?"

"I don't know, somewhere, but it was too late. He was looking for people that had to go away with the rest of them."

"Who?"

"I don't know. But he was. Harry, what day is it?"

"Lord, Freda the end of March sometime. I don't know. But—"

"But it was all snow out."

Silently Harry got up and stood on the deep rug. His slippers slid obediently across the floor and squeezed under his feet. Wearily he plodded out towards the living room and the front door with his wife behind him. Everything was absolutely quiet.

"If it's March, there shouldn't be so much snow," said Freda. Carefully Harry turned on the front lights, flooding the area in front of the door. The snow was only a few inches deep.

"See," said Harry.

"But," said his wife, "we're on a hill and the wind would blow it all away. Down there it was much deeper."

"How do you know?"

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"In my *dream.*" Her husband looked amused.

"Freda," he said, "you're geting upset. These few weeks have been too much for you." He switched the light off. "Now suppose there are footprints out there; I think I saw some, as a matter of fact, being covered by drifting snow, but what would that prove? That another young man's Car had broken down, that's all. Like the one last week."

"Oh no, it was a month, dear."

"Not that long."

"Oh yes, a month."

But of course there was no way to prove which it was, since the calendar had broken down, but it must (thought Harry) have been only a week ago, since it was so obviously winter out. A very odd winter, he thought (they were going back to the bedroom now) for it seemed to be colder than any he remembered. A vague thought moved in his mind; in the moment he had the front-door lights on, he had happened to glance at the thermometer near the door and it seemed to have burst at the bottom.

Very strange; it was supposed to go down to eighty below, though of course they had never had weather like that. He climbed into bed beside his wife, dismissing the thought. The stuff they made nowadays was shoddy. Not like his House.

"Good night, dear," he said. "We must be missing the newspapers on the biggest cold spell in history."

"Yes, Harry," she said.

"You need a good night's sleep."

"Yes, Harry."

And they settled down once again to wait for spring.

Freda finished the crossword puzzle and put it down on the kitchen table, as she did with a new crossword puzzle every morning, now that their Communications were out of order. The thought occurred to her that there would be no new one the next day and she had better erase this one, so she did. But of course—wait—this was yesterday's. Or was it from the day before? No, yesterday's; she was quite sure of it. Behind her, the Real Food chute was humming preparatory to delivering her Real Food after-breakfast coffee, as it did every morning. *That* was still working, at least; it would be a shame to send Harry out in the cold to a neighbor's because their House had broken down. But of course a few days' deprivation of Communications wouldn't hurt anyone.

Yawning, Freda went into the living-room and sat down with her crossword puzzle by her favorite window, the one that overlooked the highway. She began to do the puzzle and then suddenly realized she had already done it. But had she? It was per-

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fectly blank. No, no, she thought, don't be silly; of course you did it. You always do it in the kitchen and here you are in the living room. Harry was still asleep, of course, but then he had been working only a few days before, so naturally he enjoyed the vacation more than she did.

She watched the Cars shooting past on the highway. Some day she really must put on an artificial scene. But was this an artificial scene or not? She couldn't decide. Suddenly she noticed that the trees outside the window were in leaf, full green leaf, oh how lovely! She jumped up to tell Harry (the puzzle falling from her lap), but then a fancy took her that this was only an artificial scene after all.

I must, she thought, go outside there was some reason she could not go out. It was too cold. But how could it be too cold if the leaves were out? And there, there by the side of the highway, a little girl in a red dress ran out to retrieve her sandpail and then turned and ran back among the trees. They must be having a picnic, the first of the summer. No, no, wait—something moved uneasily in Freda's mind. She had seen the little girl before. The morning before, the little girl had run out in just that way. And the morning before that? Yes, the morning before and the morning before.

"Harry," called Freda uncertainly, "How long—" but that was ridiculous, she thought. It could only be a few weeks. No one had come to see them.

(Ah yes, said her thoughts, but you told them not to call, and then then you disconnected your mail and your phone.)

No one had come from the Company.

(You never called them back.)

There was no dust, no scratches, no wear of any kind.

(The House cleans and renews itself every day.)

How long had it been? she thought: a month, several months, a year? Could it have been a whole year? Or ten? Or twenty?

"We haven't gotten a day older!" she exclaimed in fright.

(But, said her thoughts, every day was like every other day. Maybe if you do the same things every day, and say the same things and eat the same things, always at the same time—)

"Harry!" called Freda, but not loud enough for him to hear in the bedroom. Oh, it's silly! she thought; so to make herself feel better she went back to looking out the window. The Cars were still streaming past. A little girl in a red dress ran out to retrieve her sandpail and—

"Oh really, it's stuck!" said Freda, for the scene had suddenly stopped, frozen in place like a photograph. Oh dear, oh dear,

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she thought, frightened, so it is an artificial scene after all.

The novelty of something actually changing in the House oppressed her so that she could hardly breathe. She would have to put on another scene, just when she had gotten used to that one, and then Harry would be angry and say that every change in their routine would make them grow older. Freda pulled the switch that cleared the window and made it transparent. As she did so the leaves on the trees, the trees, the Cars, the road, all wavered, blurred, began to melt and slide like water. Freda sat in her chair inside the warmth and comfort of the House, impatiently, somewhat nervously waiting for the window to clear and the outside view to show through. The window cleared. Freda began to tremble.

She found herself looking at a wall of snow. Perpendicular, straight as steel, it towered above the house and way above it, almost at the very top of the window, were stars in a night-time sky. The sky was so very black and the stars so very bright that they lanced through Freda's eyes and made her lower her gaze to the wall of snow again.

Even without the light from the House she could have seen the snow, for the light of the stars seemed as intense as moonlight, and it spilled down the sides of the wall of snow. The wall was some twenty feet from the side of the House; it stood impenetrable, terrifyingly solid, but there at the edge of the wall where the heat from the House had cleared a space around it, a very strange thing was happening. The snow melted but it did not melt; it exhaled, it breathed white vapor, it boiled, it whirled and writhed upwards in a hundred fantastic shapes, hurrying swiftly into the black night sky above. On the top of the wall (barely seen from the House) were shining, sparkling pools of liquid, pools that moved sluggishly this way and that.

Behind Freda the House spread its usual rosy warmth, noon in the kitchen, afternoon in the living-room, twilight in the dining room, but here spring, summer, fall and even winter had died. For this immortal cold was a sun away from winter.

It *was* deeper in the valleys, thought Freda idiotically, and when all the air on earth froze, most of it must have drifted down there and my dream was right. But no, no, it could not have been air in my dream, for there was a man walking on it; that must have been a long long time ago. How long, a hundred years? A thousand? Million? No, no, she thought, longer than that, much more than that but . . . how could it be? The House had

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begun to break down only yesterday. I'm sure, she thought, that it was only yesterday.

Harry came out of the bedroom, yawning as he always did at the time he always came out every morning, and as he looked and saw, Freda turned. The Panel near the window glowed with its five ruby eyes. Five? No, six. Twelve. Twenty. Then more and more until the whole Panel glowed red as a cluster of cherries. In case of failure of Air, she thought, throw open the front door and admit Natural Air into the House. "Oh Harry, what shall we do?" she said, but there was no particular need to answer; the cherries dimmed, darkened, and then became green, green as maple leaves, green as the young green on hedges.

Freda had time only to say "Oh, Harry!" and he, "Freda, what —" when the House gave a little tentative shake and then another and then shivered into a hundred —no a million—no many, many more atoms, atoms that threw the airy snow up in a great billowing rise. The crisp noon kitchen, the mellow, living room, the Real Food chute, the self-renewable rug, the sealed windows—all in a tremendous whoosh into the air. But not into the air, rather into the space above the air, and then it settled down on to the frozen air, on to the sluggishly living pools of liquid hydrogen, bounced a little, billowed a little, and finally lay quietly, invisibly, over a radius of some hundred miles.

The House almost *had* lasted forever . . . as such things go.

Snip, Snip

The topologist's mind came unguided
When his theories, some colleagues derided.
Out of Moebius strips,
Paper dolls he now snips,
Non-Euclidean, closed, and one-sided.

—Hilbert Schenck, Jr.

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Mr. Graves offers a report which you may or may not believe —as you choose, of course—concerning a man residing under a sign reading, "He being dead yet liveth."

Interview with a Dead Man

by Robert Graves

AFTER AWHILE THE DEAD MAN, recognizing my voice, began to whistle and imitate the masters of his old school, many of whom, bicentenarians, survived him. 'Though perhaps no longer, ahem, in the active pursuit of pedagogy,' he intoned in a mock-clerical voice.

'What's the news?' I asked.

'News?' he said. 'Well, for a start here's a letter that came last night from my executors informing me that I am expected to write a posthumous Anthem for the League of Nations suitable for translation into at least twenty-seven languages.'

He went on to say that he had indeed already executed the commission: early that morning he had written a marching song of hope, to rhythms heavily stressed for percussion purposes, and poked it up through the letter slit of the stout Welsh-quarried slabs of slate, inscribed 'HE BEING DEAD YET LIVETH,' which formed the roof of his quasi-eternal resting place. He had, however, recollected the nearness of the church, where the song would undoubtedly be sung at Christmas and Easter, on Empire Day, the King's Birthday, and all similar semireligious, semipolitical feasts; and had slowly pulled the composition back and torn it up before the sexton had caught a glint of it.

'It was an ironic production,' he said, 'but the living can never believe that the dead have a sense of humour, so whenever any reference had been made to the song in my hearing or whenever it was sung or whistled, I should have been forced to chuckle audibly to disprove this popular fallacy.

'I am beautifully embalmed,' he continued. 'They were obliged, of course, to remove my digestive and sexual organs, which are corruptible, but I still have my fingers free to pick my nose in the old absent fashion, to scratch my head when it itches and to use a pencil thoughtfully when the itch is eased. This is a lidless coffin al-

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lowing me plenty of elbowroom. My eyes are shut with coins, but that is no handicap in the decent darkness of the vault; even when alive, I always had the knack of writing with my eyes shut. I lay the left hand flat as a margin to the paper and, pricking the skin with my pencil each time, know by sensory indication just where to begin the new line.'

Thus he rattled on, remarking among other things that at least he had no more financial worries. He had benefited handsomely under his own will and paid the lease of the vault and of a small plot of land around it for ninety-nine years in advance. Unfortunately the freehold, the property of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, was not for sale; he had, however, secured the option for renewal at the same terms when the ninety-nine years should have expired. He asked for news of his wife and children and of their stepfather.

In short, he was perfectly dead, and his daily postbag, because of the recency of his death, was enormous; he used the blank pages of letters and the back of envelopes for his replies. He was in no position to buy stationery, even if his signature to cheques or letters had been valid, which it was not. However, he calculated that the serviceability of his large gold propelling pencil (which held, screwed in its base, a copious supply of refills) could even at the present extravagant rate of daily use be prolonged for fully another three hundred years.

'With care, for as long as three thousand years,' he cried, 'and by that time who will care for my work except antiquarians?'

His mood was now so hilarious that I had no compunction in leaving him without another word of commiseration or encouragement. His parting joke was one about the legal impossibility of the dead libelling the living.

'But,' he said, 'I am careful not to trade on my immunity. I flatter myself that I died a sportsman and lie buried as such.'

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Edward S. Aarons' first appearance in F&SF was with "The Communicators," and an impressive s.f. debut it was. Mr. Aarons' ASSIGNMENT *series (Gold Medal) keeps him regrettably busy; fortunately, however, he recently found time between books of international intrigue to produce this second lively tale of love and battle and strange mental powers.*

THE MAKERS OF DESTINY

by Edward S. Aarons

THE WARNING PROBE ENTERED Mugrath's mind. It came all at once, prodding his consciousness like an irritating finger. It had been happening like that lately, and more frequently these past few days.

He was careful not to break his stride. He gave no sign than anything unusual had occurred. He knew he walked in mortal danger—not so much from the enemy pursuing them with wild Rebel yells through the Virginia woods, but from the thought-finger itself. The probe warned him of danger, and yet it could destroy him, too.

Johnny Yellen, for instance, would shout him to the sorcerer's fire, if Mugrath's abilities were suspected.

Mugrath maintained the steady jogtrot that the survivors of the Fifth New Hampshire of the New Army of the Potomac had taken up to escape the rapacious wings of the Virginia cavalry. The Third Battle of Bull Run on April 9, 2065, was ended, and the North Union armies under the command of General Joshua U. S. Niles were in full and disgraceful retreat up the Shenandoah Valley.

"Charley," Johnny Yellen gasped.

"Yup," Mugrath said, saving his breath.

"You see something? Are they over there?"

Mugrath kept running through the shattered, smoke-streaked woods. "Who?" he asked. "Where?"

"The Rebs, confound it! You keep lookin' to our right flank like you could see 'em, boy."

"No," Mugrath lied.

The right flank was where the finger pointed to danger like a flaming red warning sign.

Johnny Yellen looked at him

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curiously and jogged on ahead.

They were all without weapons. They had been running and reeling and falling and dying in these Virginia woods since an hour after sun-up. No man knew where safety might be.

It had been a hot, dry spring. The brush was like tinder, and somewhere to the south the forests were burning. The smoke haze covered the sun, so that it was only a vast, luminous, expanding glow beyond the gray streamers of ash sliding through the woods. Mugrath, born to the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the cool reaches of the Presidential Range, thought the heat was unendurable. It suffocated him, and he coughed and choked and felt his strength sapped by the close blanket of smothering air.

He had long ago thrown away his pack and the clumsy solar rifle and blanket roll. The others had done the same, since the rout. But his relief at shedding this excess weight was short-lived.

He could run no farther. He had to rest.

He stumbled, fell, got up, fell again, sprawled as he was. The earth reeled and heaved under his panting, groveling body.

"Charley, Charley, get up!"

"I can't," he gasped.

"The Rebs will get you!"

"I don't care any more."

Johnny Yellen stood over him, straddle-legged, enormous, a giant in the blue-black Puritanical uniform of the North Union. His yellow beard seemed to move in the hot, smoky wind that slid through the forest. There was an unnatural glow in his pale eyes, sunk deep in his hollowed face.

"Boy, come on, don't die here. Don't die on me. We're looking for Niles. He'll get us straightened out."

"The General isn't over that way," Mugrath said.

"How would you know?" Yellen knelt beside him in the brush. A dead man grinned at the two survivors from a shattered oak nearby. "What's the matter with you lately, Charley?"

"Nothing. I'm finished, that's all."

"General Niles will pull us out of this."

"That son of a bitch," Mugrath whispered.

Yellen was shocked. "Charley, hey, don't talk like that."

"Old Joshua U. S. Niles. He walked us into that trap."

"Charley, Charley, shut up, for God's sake!"

"Go away," Mugrath whispered. "Let me be."

"How do you know Niles ain't straight ahead?" Yellen persisted.

"I didn't say that."

"You did."

The finger poked, prodded, jabbed in frantic warning. The danger now came straight from

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Johnny. Mugrath suddenly realized he could see the suspicion in Yellen's thoughts, as clear as day, like viewing a stereo film in the back of your own head.

He closed his eyes and pretended Johnny wasn't there.

When he opened them, Johnny was gone.

The Communicator men stood just below the crest of the knoll where General Joshua U. S. Niles conferred with his unhappy aides. In their Puritanical black, their faces shadowed under broad-brimmed ebon hats, the two representatives of the North Union's unofficial government were like a pair of ominous birds of prey.

None of the military wished to be seen near them. Cabbott, Senior Communicator, was just as pleased. He addressed his associate, Copywriter Grieg, without speaking.

—Is he coming?"

—Yes, sir. Mugrath is on his way.

—I perceive no coherent motivation in the subject as yet.

—That is true, Communicator. Subject Mugrath rejects any recognition of his mutant powers.

—Naturally. He doesn't care to be discovered as a sorcerer and burned for it.

—I fear for him, Communicator.

The sun beat down fiercely on the two black-garbed figures. General Niles happened to glance their way, and uneasiness roweled his austere features. It had been a bad day. The Virginia Confederation Armies had broken through on a broad front, and the Potomac forces were in disorderly retreat. Only a miracle could save the affair from total disaster. For a moment, Niles, gaunt and haggard, wished with heretical desperation for the nuclear weapons of past generations. Then he rejected the wish with a shudder of despair, recognizing the continuous downward spiral of self-destruction. *Back to the mud, the apes?* He looked with hatred toward the two black-clothed Communicators, and wished them in hell.

Communicator Cabbott stared in fierce concentration at the smoke-hazed valley to the south.

—What is it?— Copywriter Grieg, a young, pink man, asked.

—This must be clarified for Subject Mugrath.

—Are you sending the assassination orders?

—He must be made to face the truth about himself.

—The whole truth?

—And then we will make him reject it.

—He is in grave danger.

—We will save him. We must!

The impulses from Cabbott were harsh, drumming painfully in the receptive caves of Grieg's young mind. Grieg almost felt a twinge of sympathy for Charles Mugrath.

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Mugrath felt confusion, chaos, consternation.

He stood up, coughing as the drifting smoke in the woods got into his lungs and threatened to strangle him.

The pain in his head was intolerable, and he wondered vaguely if a stray bullet from the Virginia Rebels had struck him. He felt himself all over, looked at his hands, his legs, his body. There was no blood. He had not been injured.

Then why the pain? Why the confusion?

For the first time, he felt as if his destiny were not of his own making. He felt the pressure of enormous forces around him and in him. He ran, stumbling, falling, running again, careening through the woods. He could not run fast enough to escape.

He fell down the bank of a ravine, splashed through a cold brook that reminded him of his home. He could see nothing through the smoke that filled the gully. Gunfire rattled behind him, the *phut-phut* of solar guns. A man screamed in the distance. He panted like a dog, wishing with all his heart he could roll back the last three years of soldiering and be twenty-five again, back with Aunt Martha on Passaquan Mountain.

Then, like the fierce stroke of an eagle's talons, hatred pierced him.

The battle was lost, and the war would never end, because of the stupidity of the leaders, the arrogance and complacency of men like General Joshua U. S. Niles.

Men like Niles ought to be shot.

Kill them, and the war would end.

Mugrath stood up. He shook with his thought and his hatred. He remembered the one time he had seen General Niles in a military parade in Philadelphia. Everyone but Mugrath in the Fifth New Hampshire Regiment had been impressed by that gallant, hawk-like figure. But Mugrath had collapsed in the reviewing line as if struck by lightning. He had fainted dead away.

Afterward, Corporal Yellen said it was the sun. But that day in Philadelphia had been raw and wet and cold.

Ever since, it needed only the mention of General Niles' name to conjure up the man's image, familiar and yet strange, a haunting face that he hated for no reason he could fathom. It took only the man's name to re-awaken the quivering sickness in Mugrath.

Well, it could be solved.

On this day of defeat, Niles would die, as so many poor, ignorant New England troopers had died.

Communicator Cabbott gave a soft sound of satisfaction.

—It is out of the subject's subconscious now.

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—The distance is too great for me— complained Copywriter Grieg.

Cabbott paid no attention to his assistant. His funereal clothing, hallmark of the resurgent Puritanism of the North Union, soaked up the heat of the hazy sun. He ignored personal discomfort and turned his attention to the group of military men consulting on the crest of the knoll.

—We will suggest that General Niles retire to his tent to consider military strategy.

Cabbott was aware of Grieg's deep and humble admiration. He ignored this as he ignored his personal discomfort. He could not afford to lose Mugrath. Of all the potential recruits into the ranks of Communicator agents, Mugrath had the greatest undeveloped resources, greater than any previous candidate. It would take time; a year of hard work for the neurosurgeons at the Hospital. But it could be done.

Cabbott's lean body stirred. Exhaustion from the extreme mental effort of following Mugrath's unseen, stumbling progress from a distance of over five miles had carved deep lines about his uncompromising mouth and shadowed the brilliant blue of his eyes.

History, Cabbott thought fiercely, must and will be changed. The confusion and disintegration of six decades following the disastrous Ten Day Atomic War must end some day in a renascence for the Americas. Union would be achieved again. The isolation and insular contempt in which the rest of Mother Earth's peoples held the retrogressive American confederations must be broken.

The stream of world progress had flowed on, leaving the Americas in a punitive backwater. The other combatant, the Soviet Union, was equally isolated. It was rumored, but not confirmed, that the Chinese had taken the cultural and scientific lead, reaching into space as far as the outermost planets. But no space exploration, no nuclear research, was permitted here, by eternal covenant.

Eternity, Cabbott thought, is a problem in semantics. Nothing in a given form is truly eternal. The course of history will be changed. The fool who had panicked far back at the turn of the century and dropped the H-bomb on Moscow in the mistaken belief that an emergency crisis had arisen (but it was only the accidental explosion of a French atomic power plant that shook the world with the belief that Cold War had changed at last to Hot)—that fool was now glorified in school-book texts as the savior of the West. If the circumstances of destiny could have been controlled then, as the Communicators tried to do and often succeeded in doing, now, everything would have been different.

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But it was not too late. Time lost could be regained.

It was up to Mugrath.

Cabbott sent a powerful, angry, lashing probe into the woods toward the stumbling soldier crouched in that distant ravine.

Mugrath got up again. Strength poured into him. He was young, powerfully built; his crazy New England features set into a grim mold. He did not question the certainty with which he chose his direction. For a long time now, he knew he possessed the power of sorcerers, the perceptions that the vast, superstitious masses viewed with terror and fought with the witch-hunts of long-ago Salem. Now, he was neither frightened nor anguished by the knowledge that he was different; he had a mission to perform.

He stared up at the vast glow of the luminous sun. It was setting in the west, over the rolling, burning Alleghenies. He walked with an objective, seeking first a weapon. Here and there in the still woods, a soldier's body sprawled or curled in grotesque death, North Union and Virginia Confederationists alike. Mugrath stopped, picked up a solar rifle, considered its clumsy bell-like muzzle, and threw it away. A little farther on, he found a sheath knife. Its blade was sharp and keen; in the setting sun, the steel winked viciously.

The knife would do.

He seemed to hear an echo of agreement in the back of his mind, but he ignored it.

He walked for an hour, completely lost from his company and his friends. He was a man alone. The sounds of battle had long ended, and in the woodland came the first timid sounds of small animals and birds, reviving after the shattering din of the morning struggle. Mugrath moved warily. He found he could probe ahead, searching the woods before him for all dangers. There were none. And at last, as evening sent long shadows over the exhausted land, he saw the tent of General Joshua U. S. Niles.

—He is learning.
—It is amazing.
—And without surgery, too.
—Can you handle him, sir?
—We must not lose him.

Now, for the second time in his life, Mugrath saw General Niles. He felt a dizziness, an acrid taste of hatred rising in his dry, parched throat. He thought he would faint, just at the sight of the man.

He did not understand it. Why should the image of that tall, leonine figure arouse this illness in him, this revulsion and feeling of guilt that made his whole being writhe and rebel?

He sank to his knees in the shelter of some wild laurel. He bowed

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his head, shuddering. He wanted to pray, but God had left this land. In his simplicity, he yearned for counsel from Aunt Martha, the calm of his farm home, the cool, reaching vistas of the New Hampshire hills. They were beyond grasp. He was alone with his knife, his prey, and his hatred.

The General paced restlessly back and forth before his tent. No one was with him. From the shelter of the laurel shrubs, Mugrath stared long at the tall, spare figure, studying the man that he himself might be in thirty years. The thought startled him. There was no resemblance! There couldn't be! Yet as Mugrath stared at the General, so near to death, so close and vulnerable to his knife, he felt the stirring of vague memories and the shadow of a deep, burdening shame.

—Careful, sir!

—It is difficult to stop him.

—But if he connects the General with—

—He must not have the time.

It was as if something lifted Mugrath bodily from his hiding place and drove him forward up the slope toward the General's tent. The shadows were thick and dark all around him. Only Niles was visible before his glaring eyes. The knife felt heavy and solid in his hands.

Mugrath yelled.

Joshua U. S. Niles turned and looked in amazement at the ragged, youthful figure of one of his troopers charging toward him. The boy had a knife in his hand. His face was contorted with a hatred that struck sudden panic into the older man's heart.

But Niles, for all of today's military disaster was brave, and he was quick. Faced with mortal peril, it was as if other hands guided him, other minds fastened with kinetic strength upon his mind and body.

"Son, don't—"

"I'm not your son!" Mugrath screamed. "Don't say that!"

He struck viciously with the knife. He wanted to kill, to force the blade home into the old man's body, to feel the steel grate against bone, slice through flesh and cartilage and spill smoking blood upon the cooling earth.

—You made Niles say that, sir?

—Of course.

—But I cannot control the boy now.

—Then we will control the General.

Niles did not cry out for help. He parried Mugrath's first blow with a swing of his cape, and the knife went hissing through the black fabric. He dodged a second blow, his face expressionless, his old eyes never leaving Mugrath's wild features. Mugrath jumped,

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tripped over a tent rope, fell against the canvas. The tent collapsed. He tried to get up, and the fabric tripped him, and an old iron hand closed on his wrist.

"Son, what ails you?"

"I'm not your son!" Mugrath cried again.

"Drop that knife, boy."

"I'll kill you, Grandpa! I'll kill you! It's all your fault!"

The General thought the boy was mad.

He did not question the source of his strength, any more than Mugrath could question the strange slowness of his reflexes, or wonder at the feeling that some inner power had abruptly deserted him.

He felt betrayed, but surely it was the Lord's will.

Mugrath sobbed in his knowledge of defeat.

He tried once more to free the knife and drive it home. But the old man's grip was a grip of iron. Mugrath felt his strength fail. He was forced to his knees. Incredibly, he struggled in the dust, seeing the old man, this general, this *grandfather,* winning over him as he had always won . . .

The knife went flickering out of his fingers and was lost.

There were shouts, and the pounding of feet running toward him. He was dimly aware of many men converging on the scene, and he gasped in dismay, knowing he had failed, knowing he was doomed. A darkness rose up in him that was only a foreboding, he knew, of the darkness of death.

He awoke to light. It glared in his eyes with antiseptic brightness, stabbing into his brain.

"Charles Mugrath?"

He groaned.

"Charles, listen to me."

It was a quiet, deep voice. It seemed to make the probing light easier and gentler. He knew he was still alive, but he did not understand why, or where he was. He bit his lip until the blood ran.

"Don't do that," the voice said. "You are safe. We have taken you from military custody. You are in our care now."

Mugrath sat up. He was in a small, white room. The light above lifted and swung gracefully away and vanished into dim blue shadows. He looked at the grim, vulturine black figures of two Communicators, and shuddered in reflex. Everyone feared these men, and Mugrath was no exception. In his youth, he heard stories about their manipulations, the rumors that they, and they alone, held a cohesive power over the nation. Indeed, there were no confederation boundaries for the Communicators among the various political entities into which the American nation had long ago split.

"You are an assassin," the older Communicator said.

"What?" Mugrath said. "What? Did I kill him?"

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"An assassin in intent, I should say."

"Then the General is alive?"

"Yes."

"So I failed," Mugrath whispered.

"Not entirely."

"Even so, why was I not shot then and there?"

"We saved you."

Mugrath stared. "You? Why?"

There was no reply. Mugrath wondered where this room might be. He had never seen anything quite like it before. The design of the furniture and soft pastel coloration was unlike anything sponsored by the severe and austere New Puritan regimentation. He reacted with conditioned contempt for the foreign influences of decadence.

Communicator Cabbott and Copywriter Grieg stood across the room from him. No windows or doors were visible, although Mugrath reasoned there must be a door somewhere, perhaps behind the soft folds of Chinese draperies. Cabbott's bony face looked at him with sorrow, and Mugrath wondered about this, too. Grieg could be dismissed, he thought. He was startled when Grieg flushed at that instant and looked angry. A thin smile curled Cabbott's lips.

"We read your thoughts, Subject Mugrath."

"How do I know your names?" Mugrath countered.

"You have a rudimentary psi-ability," Cabbott replied. "You possess the chance, mutated power that the commoners know and fear as witchcraft and sorcery. Did you not suspect it?"

Mugrath shuddered. "Yes, I suspected. Will I be burned?"

"Not by us. We will help you."

"Why should you?"

"Because we have the power, too. And much more highly developed than your native ability, thanks to surgery. We have other powers, as well."

Mugrath was frightened. He stood up. His legs trembled. "What are you going to do with me?"

"First, we will tell you about yourself, Charles."

"I'm nobody," Mugrath muttered. "Only a simple soldier."

"Not every simple soldier is driven by a compulsive desire to kill his General, boy. Why did you pick Niles as the object of your hatred?"

"I don't know," Mugrath said. "I don't understand."

"Why did you cry out that you were not his son?"

"I didn't do that—did I?"

"You did."

"I don't know why I screamed that," Mugrath said.

"You screamed it because General Joshua U. S. Niles is the psi image you have always retained of your true grandfather."

"Grandpa died long ago. Aunt

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Martha told me about him. He was killed when a tractor overturned on him, on the farm."

"That is a lie."

"No!" Mugrath shouted violently.

"You lie to yourself and to us."

"No! No!"

"Who was your grandfather, Charles?" Cabbott asked. His eyes flamed. "You knew once, when you were a little boy. And then you forgot it deliberately, because the relationship was too ugly and cruel to admit. You have carried guilt for him all your life, and never willingly acknowledged it."

Mugrath turned and leapt at the wall. He tore down the draperies in a frantic, ripping, animal demand to escape. A tremendous pressure burst inside his brain. He sobbed and wept and tore around the room. The two Communicators passively watched him. They made no attempt to help or hinder him. They simply watched.

He could not find a door. There was no door.

He fell, gasping, to his knees, and bowed his head until his face touched the carpeted floor.

Cabbott said gently: "You identified your grandfather with General Niles, Charles."

"Don't do this! Don't make me—!" Mugrath sobbed.

"It is necessary that you face the truth. Then you will forget it again. I promise you this. You will move through pain to glory. I promise this, too." Cabbott intoned the lines as a high priest might recite his litany. "Stand up, Charles Mugrath. Face the truth. Accept the burden of your guilt, in order to throw it aside."

"No!" Mugrath screamed. "I'll kill you first!"

He leapt at the Communicator men. He fell through their images, plunging through thin air, hit the wall beyond, whirled, gasping, and saw them turn to face him.

"What—?"

"We are not here," Cabbott said. "Only our projected images are here."

"You're sorcerers!" Mugrath whispered. "Traitors, practicing black arts—"

"Such talk is for commoners. You are not a commoner, Charles."

Mugrath lunged at the figures again. He could not believe the two men were not really there in flesh and blood. He fell through the images twice more before he collapsed on the floor.

Cabbott's voice was relentless. "Stand up, Charles, and tell us about your grandfather."

"I don't know anything!"

"You know. Tell us and tell yourself. You tried to kill your grandfather today, transferring his identity to the person of General Niles. Why? You feel guilt. You carry in you the torment of guilt for the mistakes of your ancestor. Face it, acknowledge it, and be free."

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"Why do you bother with me?" Mugrath groaned.

"We need you."

"I'm just a simple farmer, a soldier drafted in this war—"

"We want you with us."

"Why? Why?"

"You are the raw material from which we recruit our people. But we cannot use you with the psychological pressures you bear. You must be cleansed of your feelings of guilt."

"I've done nothing!" Mugrath cried.

"You tried to kill your general, because he reminded you of a man you knew when you were but a child, and because you are that man's grandson. Your Aunt Martha gave you her married name of Mugrath and helped you to forget your true paternity."

Mugrath shuddered. He felt ill. The pain inside his head was beyond endurance. The bright light came back, explosively, and through it, like dark beams of reverse radiance, came the rolling, proving, persuasive voice of Communicator Cabbott.

"You studied history as a child. The facts of the Ten Day War are well known to the populace. This was the explosive end of the so-called Cold War that lasted so many decades—indeed, almost to the end of the century. By then, tensions had reached the critical point. Mankind was on the point of madness. Something had to yield, and your grandfather was only a symptom of the times."

"Air Commander Mayhew," Mugrath whispered. The name tore at his soul, burned his tongue. "He's the one."

Cabbott's image nodded. "A fine man, but the wrong man to be flying orbital patrol with hydrogen bombs at the moment Paris went up in that reactor explosion. Perhaps any other man would have done as Mayhew did, assume the war had started, open his retaliatory orders, and bomb Moscow. He started the Ten Day War, Charles. In our history books he is a hero. But we all know the truth. The Ten Day War destroyed the West and the Soviets. We relapsed in barbarism for two decades. Our nation was split and destroyed into the present warring Confederations. Mankind on Earth isolated us, imprisoned us in our continental boundaries. Today, we are left far behind. We do not even know what vast progress has been made by others. Space is not permitted to us. Nuclear power is out of our hands. We are treated as lepers, for having destroyed half the world in a moment of panic. The moment of panic experienced by your grandfather, Charles—Air Commander Mayhew."

Mugrath heard the words and knew the truth.

He clapped his hands to his ears and groaned.

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He shook and shuddered.

And then he fainted.

—What happened, Communicator?

—It may have been too much for him, Copywriter Grieg.

—Can you reach him?

—No, not at the moment.

—We may have destroyed him, Communicator.

—Let us hope not.

—He may destroy himself now, sir. There is that danger.

—It would be a pity.

Mugrath awoke a second time, to find that the tormenting light was gone, and the room had returned to its pastel softness. He lay still for long minutes, thinking of many things. His mind drifted back and forth, from past to present, from Aunt Martha and New Hampshire and the farm, and the dim figure of his grandfather, to his present condition. He had no idea where he was. He did not even try to guess what might be planned for him. A soldier who tried to kill his commanding officer would normally be shot on the spot. Yet he was alive. He was warm and comfortable.

He faced the truth of what Cabbott had forced into the open plains of his mind. It did not trouble him.

What gave him anguish was the knowledge that he was a sorcerer. He did not try to guess what the Communicators — all sorcerers, they!—might want with him.

He felt thirsty and hungry.

He decided to escape.

And with that decision, came cunning.

Now that he knew the powers of Communicator Cabbott, and knew some of his own powers as well, he could plan. First he wanted freedom. He wanted a time of quiet, of solitude. The war was ended for him, he knew. Whatever happened, he would never be a soldier again.

He closed his mind to all outside thoughts.

He did not know, until he decided to do this, that it could be done. He did not know how he managed it. But he did it.

—What happened, Communicator?

—Something has changed.

—I perceive nothing, sir. Is he still unconscious?

—No, he is awake.

—But if he has wakened, sir—

—I simply cannot reach him now.

There was a door, after all.

The Communicators had hidden it from him by using the same powers that had enabled them to project their images so realistically into this room. But now their power was ended. He was free of them.

The girl came through the door,

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pushing aside the drapery. She entered at the moment he discovered the door's existence.

He knew her name at once. She was Alice Bennett. She was a corporal in the UWA, the Union Women's Auxiliary, from Hartford, Connecticut. He had never seen or spoken to this girl before, but he had swift, torn images of her past life, plucked from her mind like fragments of cloud driven in tatters before the wind of her breathless fear.

Her fear met his and merged, blended, fused into one. She ran into his arms.

"They're after us!"

"Who?" Mugrath stammered. He was aware of her slender, soft body, of the way she trembled, of the perfume of her delicate skin. He looked down into her enormous blue eyes and wanted to drown in them.

"The troopers. I'm a witch, you know. And you—you're like me," she whispered. "They were going to burn me, but I got away—"

"Come," he said.

He took her out through the door by which she had entered. He did not think too much about it. The way opened for him as if he projected some massive, invisible force. He felt calm in direct ratio to the girl's mounting panic. She moved beside him as if she were a part of him, responding to the swiftest, faintest fragment of his thought. The experience was dizzying. He had never known anything like it. They were two entities abruptly blended into one. He could see what she saw, feel what she felt, sense the tremor of her limbs, feel the intricate articulation of nerve and bone and muscle in her slender body. Lovers, he thought, were supposed to feel as one; to know a unity, an ecstatic whole coordination. Mugrath knew that his swift merging with this girl, Alice Bennett, went far beyond anything the ancient poets had ever sung about. He did not think of it as love. It was something as far beyond the ordinary loves of ordinary men as that, in turn, surpassed the sensitivity of mating beasts. His heart soared, but he was not surprised by it.

Now and then he had to coordinate her stumbling, weaker pace to his, and Alice Bennett then flashed him an understanding, grateful smile.

They fled down corridors, through portals, down long, tiered steps, past staring, uniformed people. They fled out into sunshine, down more marble steps, down one street, down another.

Mugrath realized they were in New Washington, in Northern Maryland, close to the ancient battlefield of Gettysburg.

It was all very simple and clear to him.

He excluded everything from his mind except the problem of escape.

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He left behind him his terror of the black-garbed Communicators, the punishment for what he had tried to do to General Niles, the recognition of his guilt through the faults of his grandfather.

Only once did he suddenly pause, confused by a quick pressure of threatened danger. They were at the entrance to the airfield, and someone stood beside the gate, staring at him.

It was a tall man in a lieutenant's uniform, with familiar yellow hair, thick black brows, a farmer's face. The man looked like Corporal Yellen. But the corporal was far away, in the battlefields, and this man was an officer. Mugrath and the girl rushed by him, and there was no attempt made to halt their flight.

Finally they had a copter, stolen in the deepening dusk of the heliport.

—Communicator Cabbott, sir!

—I know. Pray control your alarm, Copywriter Grieg. He has met up with Subject Twenty-Four.

—But they are both gone!

—We will find them again.

—But in his state of mind—

—Let us hope we do not recover them too late to save them both.

—Suicide, sir?

The answering thought lashed like a whip. *—For you and me, Copywriter Grieg, as well as for our subjects, if we fail.*

The copter crashed in a wooded hillside of Pennsylvania's Blue Ridge Mountains, near the banks of the Susquehanna River. It was after dark, but there was a full moon. Neither Mugrath nor the girl was hurt. He helped her from the wreckage and they walked, hand in hand, a safe distance away, and then they sank down to the dewy grass and rested.

The early spring peepers sang, the river murmured far down the mountain slope, the wind was soft and benign in the wilderness around them.

The gleam of moonlight on the river below had a hypnotic effect. They sat side by side in silence for a long time. Mugrath felt as if his burst of power and resolve were slipping away on the dark currents of the water. He seemed to hear the wind singing in the high black mountains around them.

"Charles?" the girl said.

He looked at her and loved her and cherished her. "Yes."

"Did they arrest you for sorcery?"

"Something like that."

"They called me a witch. I didn't do anything bad, though," she whispered. "I could just tell we were going to lose yesterday's battle. I was all packed and ready for the retreat, you see, and my sergeant caught me at it and suspected at once that I had the power of precognition. That's a fatal offense. They hate us so, for being

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different! You'd think they'd be glad to use our abilities, but no—they kill us!" The girl's voice trailed off, now as soft and sad as the mountain wind. "I couldn't help it, really. What makes us different, Charles?"

"The radiation effect," he said glumly. "ESP people were being recognized even before the Ten Day War. The bombs changed a few of us for the better, most of us for the worse. But I wonder if those who were born monsters weren't luckier than you and I, Alice."

"Don't talk like that," she said quickly. She touched him and they both shivered and were silent. She said finally: "I was always so lonely, knowing I was a witch. I kept hoping I'd find someone—like you, Charles." She paused. "I can feel you inside me, you know."

"Is it disturbing? Shall I leave?"

"No, I—I like it. It makes me feel—so close to you. Like being—like falling—"

"In love," he said.

"Yes," she said. "In love."

"It can't be," Murgath said.

"Why not? We're safe now."

"You don't know anything about me. Who I am, or what—"

"But I do. I know as much about you as I know about myself."

He faced her, seeing her eyes dimly radiant in the light of the mountain moon. "Alice, my grandfather—it was all his fault we live like this, like lepers imprisoned on a continental island, detested by all mankind, being backward and ignorant and divided among ourselves, savage in so many ways—"

"Hush," she said softly. "You must not feel guilt because of your grandfather's mistake."

"But I do. I can't—I can't live with it!" he cried.

"You forgot it once. Forget it again. Live with me," she whispered. "We can escape them all. We can survive here somehow, in the wilderness."

"I couldn't stand it," he groaned.

"Charles, be strong. Be—"

She interrupted herself. He felt the probe of danger, too, at the same instant. It drove them abruptly to their feet like trembling, wary animals, sensing a trap being drawn around them.

He scanned the darkness with his mind. He saw the black shapes moving down upon them from the mountain top. Men running, sliding, leaping, like a hunting pack, closing in with unerring primitive instinct and skill on two lonely targets. He scanned the river, he probed the slopes to right and left. There seemed to be a gap to the left. He chose it promptly.

"Come," he said.

The girl ran beside him as swift as the wind, trusting his superior power. He could probe ahead and see deadfalls and bogs, gullies and hollows that might have tripped them and which would surely

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have destroyed her without his guidance.

A dim animal shouting came from behind them, repeated above, repeated below. Only the way ahead, parallel to the river along the dark slope of the mountain, seemed clear. Mugrath wondered why he was running. His uniform was torn, his throat was parched, his stomach was empty. What was he running from? Death would be welcome, in the face of his guilt. The burden he carried was too great for the years ahead, or even the days ahead. What would freedom be, when he was enslaved within himself?

The girl fell.

It came without warning for him. His senses had failed. There was a thrashing, and a wild thing clawed at Mugrath's head, and Alice screamed. Mugrath fought off brambly arms, felt a loop drop swiftly over his head and shoulders. He was pinioned helplessly, swinging in space. Alice screamed again. She was in a dark pit below him, fallen through the thin, primitive trap. He swung from a giant tree limb above.

He could not understand why his new powers had failed.

Too late, he knew that the men chasing him had anticipated his ability to sense their rushing progress. They had left this channel open, driving him and the girl into a narrow wooded alley where their traps waited to be sprung.

He felt as if his shoulders were being wrenched from their sockets. Dark, shaggy shapes converged on them.

"Charles, Charles!" Alice moaned.

He turned away from her face below him. He swung like a pendant in the wind, and saw the savage faces of hill-villagers, untouched by civilization or the war or the stumbling reconstruction since the falling of the bombs.

"Witch!" they screamed. "Witch and sorcerer! We know you, witch! We know you, sorcerer!"

He said nothing.

He felt a flame of suicidal exultation leap high in him.

He wanted to die.

—Communicator Cabbott, sir, I felt it this time.

—The Force? The X that fights us?

—Yes, sir. It—it blinded me, sir.

—It is the Anti-Destiny. The Force that has subtly, and sometimes openly, betrayed all our plans and maneuvers. Whenever we seem on the verge of successfully manipulating fate, Copywriter Grieg, the Anti-Destiny factor appears. Have you ever read my monograph upon the subject?

—I regret, sir—

—You will always be a Copywriter, Grieg.

—Sir, one question: why did Mugrath give up so easily?

—Subject Mugrath is loose with

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the knowledge we forced upon him. He is not strong enough to withstand the drive toward self-destruction.

—But he was trying to escape, sir!

—True. Our task is difficult, Copywriter. We try to create a new destiny for our people, but there are laws of nature, apparently, and controls of the dimensions of time, that resist us. It is our most desperate problem. We shall never succeed unless we discover the nature of Anti-Destiny and learn to circumvent it. In this case, Mugrath's escape was in contradiction to a natural law. His perceptive powers in regard to personal danger were suddenly blanked out by the force of Anti-Destiny. And he fell into the trap.

—Mugrath is by far our most highly developed natural subject. Is it possible you hope, sir, that he will lead you to the answer in regard to Anti-Destiny?

—The subject is beyond your comprehension, Copywriter, without an understanding of my monograph.

—Yes, sir. But will we lose Mugrath now?

—We will do what we can.

—But the hill people will burn him. And Subject Bennett, sir, will go to the stake with him. Both are likely candidates as agents for Communications, for the greater glory and fulfillment of American unity.

—You are an ass, Copywriter Grieg.

—Then the savages will burn them as witch and sorcerer?

—Yes. It should make quite a spectacle. Have you ever witnessed a Salem witch-burning, Copywriter?

—No, sir. I—I have avoided it, sir.

—If we hurry, then, you will be treated to such a sight.

—Are we going there?

Communicator Cabbott's reply was a tired, impatient sigh.

The cell stank. Its floor was of mud and straw, its walls of ancient crumbling brick, its window narrow, barred, dimly lighted. Mugrath sat in a corner, hunched in a foetal position, hugging his knees, his chin sunken, his eyes turned inward.

A night and a day had passed. No one had fed them, nor had they been given anything to drink. Yet they were not forgotten, for now and then a bearded, savage villager would come and peer at them through the cell window, and curse and shake his fist at Mugrath.

During the morning, Mugrath had studied the outlook from that window, considering the old square, the county courthouse that went back two centuries, the green-encrusted, leaning First-Civil War memorial above an antique cannon. The huge old

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trees gave an illusory air of peace to the scene. The war and the complicated affairs of the North Union were remote indeed to these Pennsylvania mountaineers. Whatever centuries-old associations they might once have had with the old nation had been lost during the chaos following the Ten Day War and the falling of the bombs.

At noon, Mugrath saw a crowd of husky, bearded men setting up the burning stakes in front of the ancient field pieces of the war memorial. The piles of faggots quickly grew to frightening, heart-choking proportions. There were shouts of exultation and impatience, screams and curses, fists shaken at the ancient jail where he was housed with Alice Bennett. Women came and tried to spit at them through the barred cell window. Some men drove them off, and a great flock of pigeons went flapping and wheeling up from the cracked and crumbling pediments of the courthouse.

There would be no trial, Mugrath realized. Their fate had already been decided.

Alice crept across the floor of the cell and tried to nestle in his arms as Mugrath sat, hunched up, in the corner. Even with her torn UWA uniform, with her hair disheveled and the bruises and scratches discoloring her face, she was beautiful. Mugrath had never seen anyone so beautiful, and he felt a wracking regret that she had to die with him.

"Charles?" she whispered.

He tried to console her. "It is all right, Alice."

"But aren't you afraid to die, Charles?"

"No."

"Do you *want* to die?"

"Yes. I think so. Yes.",

Her eyes were like those of a wounded deer. He touched her dark hair gently, and she said: "Why, Charles? Why don't you do something? You're so much stronger than I. You have more power."

"Not for this."

"Ever since I knew I was a witch," Alice whispered, "I searched for someone else like me. I knew—I hoped—how it would be, if I ever found you. It—it was like a miracle. You felt it, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And now, when we have discovered each other, we must burn as witch and sorcerer. It is such an ugly death."

"Death is death. It will be quick. and it will end soon."

"Charles . . ." She paused. "You know I love you, Charles."

"And I love you," he said.

She shook her head in violent denial. "No, you don't. Otherwise, you wouldn't just sit here and *want* to die! You wouldn't dwell on the past, on your grandfather's mistake, and shoulder his guilt. We could live together . . ."

"I am sorry," he said.

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She was silent. The sun came slanting into the cell in low, yellow shafts piercing the barred window. Early flies buzzed hungrily in the filth of the cell. There were louder sounds from the growing crowd outside. Mugrath knew that dusk was the usual time for witch-burning. He had witnessed two such events, as a boy in New Hampshire the first time, as a recruit in Boston last year. He never wanted to witness another. And he had never suspected that he himself would be the main participant at such a barbarous, superstitious affair.

"Charles, look at me," Alice said. "I know we cannot escape. Not even your powers and mine can destroy these prison walls. I'm sorry I added to your misery by talking about it. I am afraid to die, of course, but now I think it won't be so bad, if we go together, and I can be with you. And I'm sure there is something—something beyond. There *must* be! And if there is, Charles, will you remember me?"

"Yes, Alice," he whispered.

"Look at me," she repeated. "Promise me. I'm sure there is something more, beyond the fire. It must be so. Promise you will find me again, promise you will remember me on—on the other side."

He looked at her. She was beautiful and he loved her.

"I'll always love you, Alice. And I will always remember you," he said. "I promise this."

The time for the burning had come.

—It seems the girl will go first, Communicator Cabbott.

—You have an irritating tendency to belabor the obvious, Copywriter Grieg.

—Yes, sir. Do we act for the girl?

—Subject Alice Bennett will be useful.

—But Mugrath, sir—he wishes to die!

—Now you will have me beat a dead dog, too, Copywriter. Of course he wishes to die. We made it so. Destiny is in our hands, we shape it in the minds of our agents.

—But if the force of Anti-Destiny intervenes—

—It will not, at this point. And when we are through with Mugrath, he will change his mind about enjoying the empty bliss of eternity.

—Yes, sir, but I don't see how—

—Have the goodness to be silent, and observe.

Mugrath did not want to watch what was done to Alice, but the two massive guards in their sweat-smelling rags held him in an iron grip, and forced him to view the flames. He tried to close his mind to the scene, but he could not. Alice looked brave and pale, and the soft pressure of her lips on his

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as they were torn apart still lingered, like the caress of the evening wind that brought spring to this forgotten, primitive village in the mountains.

The fire began to burn at Alice Bennett's feet.

They pushed him forward now, across the debris of the ancient courthouse square, along upheaved cement walks and overturned, rusty benches, where once a peaceful people sat in the sun in a progression of tidy days.

The smoke blew toward him, torn by the evening wind. It smelled acrid and wet with the green wood of the faggots. It shredded, and he saw Alice, watching her as he scarcely heeded the rough hands that bound him to the stake atop the pile of brush and cordwood.

He was tied to his stake fifty feet from Alice, facing her.

The crowd roared as his funeral pyre was lighted.

He thought he heard Alice cry out his name. His face was like stone. He did not reply. He faced her, wishing it would be over soon, done with quickly. He was not afraid. He regretted that she had been captured with him, so soon after their miraculous discovery of each other. But one did not rave at the stars for human destinies.

He coughed as the smoke writhed into his lungs.

"Charles!" he heard Alice call. "Charles, love me!"

The crowd roared and jeered. A few stones were pelted at the girl, then at Mugrath. He did not feel those that struck him. He strained at his bonds, not wanting to, and wondering with a detached mind at the rebellious instincts of the body, this wild impulse to survive, to live.

"Charles!"

Faintly, faintly through the growing crackle of the flames, the blinding curtains of smoke, he heard her beloved voice.

"Remember me, Charles. Know me, my darling!"

"I'll remember!" he shouted mightily.

The pain came up in a red tide.

Through the haze of tears in his eyes, he saw the headman of the village standing in the square and grinning at him.

He was a big man with yellow, tangled hair and black brows and high cheekbones of an Oriental cast.

He looked familiar.

He looked exactly like Corporal Yellen.

The pain returned. The redness was like the raw, gaping maw of a wild beast, and it opened wide and devoured him.

—Now, Communicator?
—Now, Copywriter.

Time was a dark river that carried him sinuously through a strange pattern of light and shade,

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brightness and shadow, pain and non-existence. There was no struggle. The river floated him, moving here, moving there, now running with swift white speed, now chuckling softly over and around the bends of a strange, unknown land, now placid and calm and deep, scarcely moving, filled with peace.

He let the river of time and destiny carry him to the place that had been ordained for him.

The river was long, and sometimes it seemed endless. He wondered, with a strange slowness of thought, formulating fragments of ideas in his shattered, changing mind, if this was true death, if this was the dark eternity that Aunt Martha had so often preached about.

Sometimes there was pain.

Sometimes the river spoke to him in garbled, echoing snatches of phrase and word—words of sympathy, words of pity, words of irritation and sharp commands.

He floated on.

There came a time which was neither day nor night. There came a place which was not here and was not there. Yet the river had stopped flowing, and it no longer supported him. Something troubled him. He did not want to leave the peaceful, serene floating on the bosom of the river that had carried him so far. But he knew he must. A sense of dedication and power, a desire to do and to live, lifted him up, and he opened his eyes.

"Charles Mugrath?"

A lean and saturnine face, studiously concerned, detached and remote, considered him as a botanist might consider an insect impaled on a mounting pin.

A name flickered in Mugrath's mind.

"Communicator Cabbott," he whispered.

The face looked pleased. "You are alive, Charles. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Mugrath said.

"A great deal of time has passed."

"Yes."

"It has been four months since we saved you from the sorcerer's fire. Do you remember that time?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember who was with you then?"

"I remember—" Mugrath paused. He looked puzzled. "I was alone. I have always been alone, and it will be like that in the future."

"In your destiny which we have designed for you."

Mugrath shook his head. "And the war? How does it go?"

"We did not lose it at Bull Run. There has been a brilliant recovery." Communicator Cabbott stood with folded hands. "We have awakened you," he said quietly, "to check the results of our work. You are a Communicator

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man now. You may sit up and look around."

It was a room like the room in which he had first seen the black-garbed Communicator. Softly lighted, windowless, doorless—actually without features. Mugrath found that he was resting on a cushioned table, and he sat up upon it and looked at the Communicator with wonder.

"I don't understand."

"The fire was real. Your death was real—to those who watched you burn and die. But—"

"There was a man watching—" Mugrath began in puzzlement.

"Many villagers watched," Cabbott said, a touch of impatience edging his voice. He was not accustomed to interruptions. "But your death was an illusion, created in the minds of the primitives who burned you as a sorcerer."

"But how could you perform such a wonder?" Mugrath said.

"You have the power to do the same, now."

"No."

The Communicator smiled. "One moment. You seem uncomfortable, Charles. Would you like a chair to sit upon?"

"I—I'm not sure I'm strong enough yet to cross the room—"

"There is no need. Create one at hand."

"Create?"

"Will one to be at your side."

Mugrath thought of a soft, basket-shaped chair such as he had once seen in a rich man's house.

It appeared beside him.

"Sit down in it, Charles."

He sat down in it. It supported him. The chair felt solid. It existed. He had created it out of his mind.

"What power is this?" he whispered.

"The power you were born with. A power that was latent in you, expressed heretofore only in clumsy, pre-cognitive abilities. You are in a hospital, Charles. A Communicator hospital. In the decades of the past, the world has ignored us, and we lost our civilized techniques in many fields—but not in medicine, and not in surgery. Techniques are used today that would be considered wonders in the past century. The finest surgeons we have are now done with you, Charles. Your neurological patterns have been altered and set free. It required many tedious brain operations. More than that, the tissues of your skin, burned in the sorcerer's fire, have been grafted back over a mesh of a new alloy. Charles, think of a knife in your hand."

Mugrath felt the hard shaft of a knife in his fingers. The blade winked and glittered, razor-sharp.

"It is a real knife, Charles. Have no doubt about it. Test it on your cot."

Mugrath drove the knife into the soft cushions. It went into the

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mattress as if it did not exist. He drove it into the wooden leg of the table. It went in an inch, paused, and quivered.

"Now," said Communicator Cabbott, "drive the blade into your heart."

"My heart?" Mugrath faltered.

"Strike, I say!"

Mugrath lifted the knife and struck at his breast. He felt the impact of his own strength, the calamitous urgency of the blow.

The knife shattered against his skin. The blade fell in twin twinkling shards to the floor.

"Nothing can harm you, Charles Mugrath," said the Communicator. "You may rest now."

—Does he remember, Communicator?

—It is too soon to determine.

—He is certainly an unusual subject. If you counter the force of Anti-Destiny in him, there will be no limit to your success, sir.

—He must be further prepared.

Mugrath lived in alternating darkness and light. He knew that strange and terrible things were being done to his body and his mind, yet he found himself able, in this odd limbo in which he floated, to view each phase of his development with a cold detachment, as if what had already been done to the infinitely intricate system of nerve cells and synapses in his brain had achieved this maturing purpose, at least. He permitted and even welcomed the ordeals he suffered, and he began to feel a strange eagerness to have it done and over with and thus begin the work for which he was being prepared.

It was all explained to him.

"We need men like you, Mugrath," the voices said. "We need strong men, unusual men, with powers beyond those of ordinary men. We, as the Communicators, consider ourselves the sole inheritors of an America that might have been—and we are dedicated to the proposition that everything our ancestors struggled for shall not fail or be wiped from the face of this green earth.

"We are divided on this continent; but we shall be one.

"We are isolated from all mankind. But mankind will welcome us when we rejoin them.

"We are in a state of semi-barbarism. But we shall reach for the stars and demand our share of mortal progress toward the eternal questions and answers of destiny.

"Only the Communicators reach beyond our barbarous internal boundaries and speak to our brother Americans in the South, in the West, in the North. The patterns of communication which we inherited from the past century form our tools. The concept of the Ad Man, the Layout Man, the Copywriter and the Communicator, the Thought-Leader and the

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Molder of the Mass Mind—this is our heritage, developed from its most primitive forms. But we do not subvert our power for commercialism, as was done in the past. Our goal is historic.

"The struggle will be hard. But we shall not fail.

"You are now one of us. You are a Communicator agent, Charles Mugrath. Your past is gone and forgotten. Your future is dedicated to us.

"You are now a man apart from all other men.

"We have made you what you are.

"You owe us your strength, your loyalty, your life.

"Arise, and shoulder the burdens of the destiny we have appointed for you."

He awoke to darkness, but he was not alone.

A doctor stood beside the bed, smiling a curious smile. Mugrath saw the white loom of his traditional, professional coat, sensed the strange triangle of his face.

The doctor's face looked familiar. Mugrath probed, but met a swirling cloud of gray dust. He was surprised. It was as if he had reached a hand into a burning flame. He had become accustomed to success with his new powers.

The doctor laughed softly.

"What color is my hair, Charles?"

"I don't know."

"And my eyes?"

"I can't see you well."

—And you know my name?

"I feel—I feel as if I should," Mugrath stammered. "But I don't—"

He tried to sit up on his bed, but immediately a terrible sense of pressure squeezed him back onto the pillow. He turned his head and looked out of the window at the hospital grounds. It was an autumn night, with a full harvest moon shining in long, silvery swathes along the lawns, forming pools of liquid ebony under the trees, flowing with bright luminosity on the empty lawns. He saw the buildings of the hospital, the winding walks and paths and shrubs, with accurate and painful distinctness.

But when he looked back at the doctor, gray dust swirled before his eyes.

"Do not be alarmed, Charles."

"This is a strange hour—" Mugrath began.

"You have a visitor, Charles."—*She wants you to escape with her.*

—Escape?

"Do you not understand you are a prisoner here? They are changing you a little bit more every day. Soon you will be someone else, no longer Charles Mugrath."

"Who are you?" Mugrath whispered. *—I know you, I know you—*

"Here is your visitor."

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Alice Bennett walked into the room.

He knew her name at once. He perceived the tumbled confusion of her thoughts from the quick, scathing probe he sent into her mind. Her surprise was echoed in himself. She had not expected to see him. Her thoughts indicated that she knew him intimately, and yet—

He looked at her dark hair, and her wide blue eyes that reminded him of . . . reminded him . . . "Charles?"

His breath came with an effort. He withdrew his probe in puzzlement.

"Charles. Oh, darling!" she whispered.

She flung herself into his arms and wept.

Mugrath held her awkwardly.

"Darling, you're alive," she whispered quickly. "I prayed and prayed, after we were parted, after that horrible fire, seeing you burn at the stake—"

"You are mistaken, Miss Bennett," he said coldly.

She looked at him with tearful, swimming eyes. "What?"

"We haven't met before," he said, "even though you seem so sure of that fact."

"You—you don't remember me?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But you promised to remember—and love me—"

"I'm sorry. I think you need some sedation, Miss Bennett."

Her whisper was a faint query, winging into the pale lemon light like the flutter of a wounded bird. "You *have* forgotten!"

"There was never anything to forget."

She was silent. She looked around the austere cubicle of his room. Mugrath searched for the doctor and saw only an angry swirl of gray dust.

"I was trying to escape just now," Alice said quietly. "They haven't finished their series of brain operations on me. Whatever they say their goals are, I don't believe it, Charles. Listen to me. Are you listening?"

"Please, Miss Bennett."

"What the Communicators are trying to do may sound good, and you might even be convinced by now that it *will* be good; but their methods, changing people, calling themselves the makers of a new destiny—"

"Doctor?" Mugrath said.

The girl's mouth quivered softly. She tossed her head, and her long hair was like ebony moonlight. Defeat and despair and heartache moved across her face. Her shoulders slumped.

"Very well. I shall go. I—I was mistaken, Charles."

She walked quietly out of the room.

Mugrath watched her go. For an awful moment her name leaped to his tongue like a cry of anguish. For a moment there was

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a pressure inside him as if something buried tidily deep inside himself tried to come to life with a stake still bloody in its heart.

He remembered—he remembered . . .

Nothing.

The earth seemed to tremble. He felt an incalculable, terrible sense of loss as she closed the door behind her, looking so proud, so defeated.

It was nonsense, of course.

He had never seen her before.

He looked for the doctor again.

When he turned, something struck him with the force of a physical blow. He fell to the floor, groaning. He strangled, coughed, felt the probes go into his mind, ripping and tearing him apart. He tried to slam the doors shut, one by one. He was reminded of a nightmare he'd had as a boy, when a wild, ravening beast prowled outside the farmhouse, seeking a way in to him. He had raced about, slamming shut the windows and doors in frantic terror, always just a desperate instant ahead of the destroyer.

It was the same thing now. He fought frantically, closing the channels, the doorways and windows and byways into his mind. He clamped them shut against the clawing probes that sought to destroy him.

Just before he fainted, he saw the face of the doctor clearly, when the gray dust blew away.

It was the face of Corporal Yellen.

Winter arrived, and the sun shone with pale yellow splendor. The seasons had come and gone, and Mugrath had not counted them.

Unlike the seasons he was free at last to come and go, in a pattern not set by nature's laws.

He walked out into the hospital courtyard and sat alone in the pale warmth of the sun. He knew his powers were great, ranging far beyond those of any mortal man who had lived before him. He had lived and died and now he lived again.

He sat in the courtyard surrounded by the tall white hospital buildings. He was not imprisoned. He could have walked out, and no man had the power to stop him. But he did not wish to walk out.

Life and activity stirred all around him as people walked on the courtyard paths under the naked trees. A muted hum came from the corridors and rooms of the antiseptic white structures. He shut them out of his mind, having learned to do so. He waited, knowing that this would be a day different from all the others.

He thought of Alice Bennett briefly. He had not seen her since that night in autumn many months ago.

He had never mentioned the doctor to Communicator Cabbott.

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An air of urgency hovered about the hospital area like the desperate flapping of invisible wings. There was an unaccustomed tension in the air, and to Mugrath's new perceptions, it grated like the exposure of raw nerve endings. It was a feeling of climax, of final effort, underlaid with a desperate sense of inevitable defeat. He sweated because of it, although the winter air was cold.

He had been reading Communicator Cabbott's monograph on Anti-Destiny. Now he stood up, hearing a silent, peremptory call for him, and he paused for a moment and deliberately tore the printed sheets into worthless scraps of paper and dropped them into a trash receptacle, before he answered the summons.

Communicator Cabbott sat behind his desk in his office in the administration building, and Mugrath paused before him, a tall young man with a craggy face and fanatical blue eyes, somber and impressive in his new black cloak.

"Charles. Sit down." Cabbott's thin mouth reluctantly smiled and then settled into its habitually austere mold. "You look impatient."

"I am ready for my work," Mugrath said. "I have been ready for some time."

"Of course. But may I ask a few questions first?"

"Yes."

"Would you care for a week or two at home, on leave, so to speak, in New Hampshire, before taking up your new duties?"

"You know there is no time for that, sir."

Cabbott was surprised. "You perceived our crisis?"

"We waste valuable minutes here."

"I simply want to be sure about the question that once troubled you, Charles."

—*My grandfather?*

—*Yes.*

Mugrath looked at the pale lemon winter sun; he looked at the bare trees, at the "patients" taking their strolls in the cloistered courtyard. He looked at Cabbott's hawk-like face. Amusement bubbled in him, clamoring against the increasing note of urgent crisis.

"You were once troubled about your grandfather," Cabbott went on. "You felt you had to atone for his guilt, Charles."

"What guilt?" Mugrath asked. "He was a simple farmer, a man who lived and died on the soil."

—*Nothing more?*

"I do not understand, Communicator."

Cabbott looked satisfied. "We will talk again soon. Come with me now. You are aware of the conference awaiting our presence?"

"Yes," said Mugrath.

They went out together. The big room nearby was impressive. It was filled with black-robed Com-

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municators, most of whom Mugrath had never seen before. The sullen pressure of their thoughts hurt his consciousness, but he opened his mind wide, allowing it all to come in, submitting to it and suffering it. He took a seat on the platform beside a lectern where Cabbott began to speak.

It was less a conference than a lecture. Mugrath listened and probed far and wide. He heard Cabbott extol the success of his own developments, self-congratulatory and smug, and he stood up obediently like a prize animal under the inspection of county fair judges when Cabbott asked him to.

Danger began a gibbering clamor somewhere in the hospital. No one else seemed to be aware of its immediacy.

"We have come to a new time of crisis," Cabbott said. "All through the history of our manipulations of destiny, in accordance with my proven and undisputed theory—" there was one faint murmur of mental dissent, quickly stifled, from somewhere among the rows of pale faces and black-cloaked figures— "we have come upon the interdiction of a natural force. Just as matter has its antithesis in anti-matter, gravity in anti-gravity, so have we found, in manipulating the future of our people, or destiny, the natural force of Anti-Destiny.

"Today is a time of new and critical events. The war of the North Union, which we have controlled from the first, has been brought to a successful conclusion by the brilliant strategy of General Joshua U. S. Niles. Today, a Second Appomattox awaits the recorders of destiny. It is to be the first step in our overall journey toward a new destiny for the Americas.

"In a few hours, the surrender terms will be signed, and the first of the interdicting boundaries that stand as barriers against continental reunification will fall.

"There still remains the inevitable counter-weight of Anti-Destiny to destroy our plans. Hence, this meeting.

"Distance is no barrier to such as we.

"Our power is great; our capabilities are many.

"No effort may be spared to offset the weight of Anti-Destiny. We —all of us in this room—will remain here for twelve hours. We shall jointly exert all the mental force within us to erect a safe shield for the progress of General Niles in his negotiations at the new Appomattox. We shall protect him from here, with the weight of our powers, with the combined and multiplied effort of us all, to guide him and prevent the natural tendency of destiny's scales to tip against us in this crisis.

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"We must not fail.
"We shall begin—"

Mugrath stood up.

His interruption produced a dead silence, and he threw his challenge into it like the throwing down of a gauntlet.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly. "I dislike to dispute with all of you. But there is no such thing as Anti-Destiny." He paused. "The entire theory is nonsense."

He might have hurled a bomb with less devastating effect. A murmur, like a shock-wave, went through the hall. The serried ranks of black-garbed Communicators wavered, shook, pulled themselves together again in reacting outrage. Cabbott's mental force seemed to burst into iridescent radiance, a red pulse of shock and anger.

"You dare to contradict a Thought Leader—!"

"Anti-Destiny," said Mugrath calmly, "is a clever theory foisted upon the Communicators as one puts blinders on a frightened horse to lead him away from danger. It has been offered to you as an explanation for all the strange defeats that stifled the program of the Communicators to lift this land out of barbarism and isolation."

—Silence! How can you dare—!

"Anti-Destiny," said Mugrath, "is a hoax to blind you to the true enemy who lives within us."

—My theory has been proven—

"Communicator Cabbott was once a respected and honored membered of your group," Mugrath went on. "His theory was put forward in all honesty and sincerity. Until two hours ago, he could have answered my charges himself. But now he is gone."

—I stand here before you—

"A dead man stands before you, gentlemen," Mugrath said. "The image at this lectern is not Communicator Cabbott!"

A burst of mental force like the scream of a mob came from the shocked audience. Mugrath paid no attention to the tidal wave of outraged emotion. He turned to face the gray-haired, impressive figure of Cabbott on the stage. Something indefinable flickered across the man's spare features.

—Stand back!

Mugrath moved forward. Only three or four steps separated him from the image at the lectern. From far away, somewhere in the catacombs of the hospital, he heard a girl scream in ultimate terror.

At the same moment, he was lashed by a force that made him stagger. Yet he plunged forward. He fell through the image of Cabbott.

The assembled Communicators groaned.

Mugrath heard the distant screaming of the girl come to an end as he scrambled to his feet again upon the platform. He was

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spun about by a kinetic force that thrust savagely at him. A wave of nausea shook him. He drove once more at the image at the lectern, and this time there came a strange bright light like a soundless explosion, and only a swirling, settling cloud of gray dust remained where the image of Communicator Cabbott had stood.

Pandemonium made a screaming ocean of sound in the lecture hall.

Mugrath straightened. He was trembling. He felt as if he had deliberately opened a door that led only onto the verge of a bottomless black pit. Nothing stood before him. He had to go forward, but he could not penetrate the darkness or find safe footing. Chaos screeched and yammered behind him, and the black danger waited ahead.

Turning, he plunged from the platform and raced through the adjacent offices into the hospital corridors.

Hands plucked at him and tried to stop him, the faces startled and alarmed. He thrust the obstacles aside with a ferocity he had never known before. In his mind, he heard the dying, strangling echoes of a final scream of despair. He oriented himself to the sound and plunged up a long flight of stairs to reach the roof.

A cold wind blew across the flat expanse of the hospital's heliport. A machine was taking off from the opposite side of the roof, hovering for a moment in the erratic buffeting of the winter wind. Mugrath threw a final, lashing probe at the glinting bubble. He met gray mist, and he had to be satisfied with that.

The cold sun looked bleak. There was a hubbub of audible and inaudible shouting behind him. There was no time to stop and explain. The calamitous pressure of defeat was enormous, pinning him to the spot where he had emerged on the roof. The wind blew and tore at his black cloak and cut at his face with icy hail. The sun disappeared. He ran at last to an empty machine, climbed into it, and considered the controls.

He had never flown a copter before.

He learned easily.

The sky was empty; the other machine had disappeared. But Mugrath followed it as if trailing a dying, echoing sob that left a tangible trail across the bleak sky.

He hurled a name ahead of him.

—Alice?

—Don't follow me!

—Who is with you, Alice?

—I am alone. No, I am not alone. Not really. I—

—Who are you, Alice?

Only a whimper answered him.

Then: *—Go back, go back, it's a trap!*

—Alice?

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The psi trail he followed was abruptly gone, erased by the winter wind and the gray, scudding clouds.

The battle lines were static across the rolling Virginia hills, frozen into immobility by the surrender negotiations between General Joshua U. S. Niles and the Virginia commandant of the Mid-South Confederation, Marshall Gregory Jackson.

Mugrath was challenged twice by military vehicles that swooped alongside, but when the operators saw his black Communicator uniform, they flew off again. At four o'clock in the afternoon, Mugrath landed the copter in a military park near the ancient monument to the original Appomattox. A road led to the Greek revival courthouse where the surrender conference was being held. He was not too late. A cavalcade of military cars indicated that General Niles had just arrived.

Mugrath commandeered a tanker from the honor guard at the copter field. Even the gray-uniformed Virginians, their faces sullen and downcast in defeat, respected his black Communicator garb. He was not questioned as he quietly strode through the sentry lines and up the broad steps into the historic building that was to see the end of fifteen years of bitter internecine war.

It was the first step, he thought, toward reunification of the continent, toward reaching out a hand to the rest of mankind.

The first step to the stars.

It must not fail; it could not fail.

There were other Communicators, some from the Virginia Agencies, in the big, barren room where the surrender papers were to be signed. One or two nodded to him with curiously reluctant amicability.

General Joshua U. S. Niles was just sitting down at the long pine table opposite Marshall Jackson of the Virginia Confederation.

Mugrath paused. The long, slanting rays of the cold afternoon sun that poured through the Palladian window seemed to turn dim and black. He staggered, fighting off a remembered nausea and dizziness at the sight of General Niles' tall, spare figure and his grim, lean face.

He remembered—he remembered—

Once he had tried to kill this man.

Why?

—Kill him now, Charles. Be rid of your guilt.

The probe struck him like the point of a lance. Mugrath leaned back against the wall, sweating suddenly. There was a muted murmur of preparatory conversation in the big room. About thirty uniformed men, ranging from Brigadier Generals and Colonels to as-

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sorted gold-braided aides in full-dress uniform, were ranged around the historic table where the surrender documents waited. Mugrath saw no one familiar except the face of General Niles.

—*Kill him!*

Frantically, Mugrath slashed around the room with a probe, seeking the source of the order. His body trembled. The sweat trickled down his face, dampened the collar of his black cloak. His hands shook. He pressed his shoulders hard against the wall and swallowed bitter acid in his throat.

Whence this wracking torment? Why this pain?

He remembered—

It came back to him like the sudden crashing, booming, overwhelming flood of a huge comber breaking on the coasts of his soul. His grandfather, his guilt, his association with General Niles—

He straightened slowly.

Nobody in the room paid any attention to him now. All eyes were fixed on Marshall Jackson's figure as he slowly and laboriously affixed his signature to the surrender documents. A lieutenant in Virginia gray sobbed openly and without shame. A collective sigh, as of long pent breaths, went up from the military aides as the documents were handed to General Niles.

—*Now, Charles! Now!*

Mugrath shuddered. He probed the room again.

Nothing.

And again.

Nothing.

The danger was here. He could hear it, almost, shrilling like the steady note of a summer cicada. He looked at the faces of the men in uniform pressed around the table. None was familiar. Had he been wrong? Was Communicator Cabbott—wherever he might be, alive or dead—was he right, after all, with his pompous, medieval theories of Destiny and Anti-Destiny?

Once more.

Gray dust flickered, vanished, flickered again.

There, over there. Near the table. Among the group of Virginia Confederation officers ranked behind Marshall Jackson. All of them were staring at General Joshua U. S. Niles as he drew the surrender papers to him and picked up his pen. All eyes were fixed in the one direction, as if caught by the magnetic attraction of this historic moment.

Mugrath looked the other way.

The officers wore sidearms, small solar pistols with bulbous muzzles against gray-clad and red-striped thighs. Mugrath felt his glance pulled back to Niles. He resisted it. The impulse to look where all the others were looking grew suddenly stronger, overpowering. He fought it silently, sweating, trembling with the effort to use his new powers.

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No one else saw what happened.

No one saw the Virginia colonel drew his solar pistol and raise it to point at General Niles.

—If you won't kill the enemy, Charles, I will!

The gray dust swirled.

The Virginia colonel had been short and slim. Now he was tall and powerful.

He had been dark-haired, with a narrow, fox-like face. Now he had yellow hair, with familiar black brows, a well-remembered flat-planed face carved in lines of autocratic brutality.

Mugrath stared at Corporal Yellen.

Corporal Yellen, Headman Yellen, Doctor Yellen, now Virginia Colonel Yellen.

—Not Yellen, Charles. Yu Lin.

Time stopped.

The march of Destiny came to a halt.

General Joshua U. S. Niles sat posed with the pen in his hand.

The Virginians stood transfixed in poses of sorrow and morbid interest, while the sobs of the Virginia lieutenant were crystallized in the air.

Yu Lin's solar gun was inches from a line of fire directed at General Niles' breast.

Comprehension burst upon Mugrath. Assassination of General Niles by a Virginia officer—who would undoubtedly be condemned later as mad—would end all surrender negotiations and finish all chances of concluding this savage war. The hopes, efforts and work of the Communicators to achieve this first short step toward a renascence of America would be crushed. The roar of anger and recrimination that would follow the assassination of Niles would drown all hope in a new bath of blood.

Here was the true force of Anti-Destiny—not some mystic, divine, or scientific law of nature that insisted man could not tamper with his future; but a personal force, a human enemy—

—Human, Charles?

Mugrath summoned all his strength, all his powers. He leaped across the frozen tableau, knocking men aside, diving around the conference table.

The solar gun flared.

He felt the whip-lash of its cosmic energy bathe him in a field of ravening fire. Light burst blindingly before his eyes. He was in the line of fire. His body, worked on surgically for almost a year, was a shield against the force that sought to destroy the General.

From his mind leaped another shield, a wide field of force that sucked up his strength like the squeezing of juice from a lemon. He fell to his knees.

He went blind.

He heard someone screaming. And then the solar gun in Yu Lin's

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hand fell, crashed to the floor, melted into the spitting pool of fire—and vanished.

Time was frozen.

—Mugrath! Must I kill you?

—You tried before. You cannot.

—You are blind now. Can you see me?

—Not with my eyes.

—Can you see Alice Bennett?

A shock, like a blow, struck Mugrath.

—No.

—She is nearby. In my hands. Give up, or she will die.

—Blackmail? No.

—For every man there is only one special woman. Each half of the human soul is designed to be complemented by another half. There is only one in every human's time that interlocks so deviously and intricately and perfectly with another. Alice Bennett is the woman for you. You know this, in your soul. Will you save her?

—This is your price?

—Yes.

—My answer is no.

A burst of sound, the clamor of frightened, angry, outraged voices, burst upon Mugrath like a thunderclap. Time resumed its motion. Destiny went forward.

Mugrath rose to his feet. He was blind indeed. He could see nothing. He felt around, thrusting out probe after probe. He knew that General Niles had hastily scribbled his famous signature on the surrender papers. The war was over.

There was angry pursuit of the Virginia colonel who, in his madness, had tried to assassinate the North Union commander.

Mugrath stood alone, feeling men push roughly by, shouting and running, searching for the culprit.

He wept salt tears with his blind eyes.

Then, suddenly, he did not need his eyes.

He pushed forward, probing, sensing, perceiving the dim shapes of reality around him. He ran from the room. Men saw his scorched face and burned black uniform and fell away from him. He ran down one flight of stairs, turned right, burst through a door into a small anteroom in a wing of the courthouse.

Yu Lin waited for him here with Alice Bennett.

—You can do no more to me, Mugrath.

—Who are you?

—We of the East, of the civilized and cultured and peaceful world, have been watching the barbarism of the Americas for many decades. You are like a vial of plague baccilli, corked and stoppered, so as not to contaminate the rest of humanity.

—We are in prison!

—And there you shall remain.

—No!

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—We have watched your Communicators develop with mechanical, surgical skills and methodology the abilities that we of Tibet conceived and evolved through many centuries of natural effort. You have much to learn, and a long path to travel.

—But we have taken the first steps!

—And you have won. But you have lost, too. Your myth of Anti-Destiny served us well for many years. Now you know us as your enemy. You shall go no farther.

—Why? The West had much to give mankind in the past. We shall give much in the future.

—China, under the guidance of Tibet, rules mankind today. What your Communicator Cabbott was to your people, I, Yu Lin, am to mine. We have analyzed the future, and we have decided that this is for the best.

—How can you know what is for the best?

—It is our decision.

—You will not keep us in prison forever!

—Our decision is final. Goodbye, Charles Mugrath.

Mugrath felt as if he had been suddenly released from steel chains. He fell to his knees. The room was empty, and he knew that Yu Lin was gone.

Empty?

His blind face turned this way and that.

Alice Bennett was with him.

He crawled toward her on hands and knees and touched her face, her body. He felt no breath of life. . .

And now he remembered, he remembered. . .

Bitterness lifted in him like the poison of gall. Yu Lin had left him this last gift, this empty body, a hollow mockery of what might have been.

Such cruelty could not be.

It had been unnecessary. It marked the enemy for what he was.

Mugrath straightened, carrying Alice Bennett's body in his arms. Only seconds ago, she had lived and breathed for him, a captive of Yu Lin, a hostage to destiny.

Seconds?

It was not too late.

Carrying her out into the waning day's light that he could sense but could not see, Mugrath entered her body, dividing himself, sliding along nerve and muscle and vein and artery, into heart and brain and lung. Dividing himself, he made her lungs breathe, her heart to pump again. He caused the blood to surge, the muscles to tremble, the brain to live. He felt the shuddering tremble of his own life move into her being.

She lived again.

The effort left him spent and gasping, near the end. He could go no further. He withdrew from within her.

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"Charles? Charles?"

"I am here."

He felt her hands touch his face in growing wonder.

"You are blind?"

"Yes."

"But you can have new eyes."

"Yes," he said. "New eyes."

"I have been asleep for so long. Do you remember the fire? Do you remember the witch's pyre? And do you remember your promise to remember me and love me?"

Mugrath stood and walked with the halting steps of a blind man toward the copter he knew was waiting for him. He felt Alice Bennett's hand touch his, holding him, guiding him. The sun had gone down at last. But there would be a new sunrise soon.

"Charles?"

"I remember," said Mugrath. "And I love you."

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XVIII

It was in 3008 that Ferdinand Feghoot, singlehanded, rescued the Reverend Mahatma G. Birdshot from the primitive humanoids of the planet called Egg, who had decided to kill him.

The Eggians took to Feghoot at once. They brought him fresh fish, fruit, and strong native beer. They gave him a bevy of their fattest, most beautiful maidens to dance the notorious erotic dances of Egg for his benefit. And they told him indignantly that their King was enraged with the missionary because he had turned down these traditional gifts with contempt.

Every day, from his prison, the Reverend Birdshot saw Feghoot disporting himself with the dancing girls—especially with one, plumper than any, and the most expert performer of all, who was getting all sorts of special attentions, meals-between-meals and high-calory tidbits. Finally he could stand it no longer. "Libertine!" he cried out. "Go back to Earth! I would rather be martyred than accept rescue from you! What are you doing to that poor girl? Are you preparing her to serve your base lusts?"

"Hush, dear Brother," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "I am doing this only for you. I am fattening her up to send back to the King. Remember—a stuffed dancer turneth away wrath."

—Grendel Briarton

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A delightful English import, concerning an ingenious, if lazy, young monk, and an arrogant goddess with a pleasingly developed sense of sportsmanship.

Game With a Goddess

By Leslie Bonnet

WHENEVER CHU YUAN-CHANG came into the temple hall with his little broom of fine twigs, the gods used to begin to grumble.

There were hundreds of them. Some were enormous, their shoulders and heads half hidden in the roof shadows. Some were of more modest size. There were gods of fire and of water, of pestilence and of famine, of food, of learning, of motherhood, of cooking. Hardly a thing you could wish for or an evil you would avert but had its god or its goddess in the great hall of the Temple of Heavenly Condescension on the Mushan mountain in the western region of China.

The most wearying task in the temple had always been the sweeping of it. It was not just a question of cleaning the floors. In the great hall, the tops of the stone platforms upon which the gods stood had also to be swept. All the way round the big feet of each god and all about the skirthems of each goddess the pedestals had to be swept meticulously with deft strokes of the little broom.

Because it was a labor of such heart-frustrating nicety, it was, of course, entrusted always to the newest and youngest of the monks.

How many hundreds of aspiring young priests had brushed diligently about the bases of the gods and, with wishful tenderness, about the extremities of the goddesses, it cannot be said. But at the time of which I am speaking, the duty was in the hands of one Chu Yuan-Chang.

This young monk was the fortunate possessor of a body of agreeable proportions and of a fresh and comely face. Nor was that all. Chu Yuan-Chang had a manner and a voice of extreme persuasiveness.

And it was because of these last gifts that the gods grumbled so profoundly upon his coming with

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his little broom of fine twigs. Chu Yuan-Chang would come pattering into the gloom of the great hall, his rusty-brown gown flying, his little broom twitching, his face alight with an obedience-promoting smile. "Now, honorable Heavenly Ones, if you will be so gracious . . ."

At first the tall throng of statues had complied with his wishes out of sheer good humor; but by the time of which I am speaking, the practice had hardened into a resented habit. Nevertheless, at his request the whole host of gods shifted their heavy feet and climbed stiffly, joints creaking, from off their pedestals. They stood in an awkward array, their giant faces still smiling, laughing, scowling, or gnashing sharp teeth just as they had been painted, while Chu Yuan-Chang quickly brushed the dust and the plaster flakes from their platforms.

If Chu were a little longer than usual in this performance there might be heard an impatient shuffling of ponderous feet; but there was never any direct protest; and when the young acolyte, with a quick smile, expressed permission for them to return, they all climbed, groaning with stiffness, back onto their pedestals again.

Among all this throng there was only a single Heavenly One who refused to move. I need hardly tell you that this was Hsi Wang Mu herself; the Golden Mother of the Tortoise; the Pure Essence of Femininity; the embodiment of yin, the female idea; the mother of nine sons and twenty-four daughters; ever young, ever fresh, ever yielding—except in the matter of stepping down off pedestals at the behest of some cursed young priestling.

And so Chu Yuan-Chang was compelled always to sweep laboriously all around the hem of her rippling white gown. As he did this (so lamentably does familiarity with the gods induce presumption) he would sometimes rest his smooth cheek against the still smoother thigh of Hsi Wang Mu, just above where her embroidered tunic of red reached her dimpled knee. Sometimes he thought (but who more fanciful than ardent young men?) that he could detect some slight convulsion of response to his impertinence; and he would look up boldly into the face of the goddess, framed in the shawl of pale gold which fell over her plump shoulders. But the face, exquisite in line, set in a smile of mocking wisdom, did not change its expression of well-remembered felicities.

To a high-spirited young man the cooperation-declining attitude of Hsi Wang Mu was a source of chagrin. During the rest of the day's duties and in the long nights

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he pondered often upon the obstinacy of this sacred creature who embodies all the essential attributes of womanhood.

And one night in the Season of Great Heat, when outside the dormitory of the acolytes the bull frogs crackled, mad with love, in the lotus lake, a thought came to him. He remembered that in the earliest days of the world Hsi Wang Mu had been much addicted to the sport of pitch-pot, at the playing of which she had beguiled idle moments with the god of the Immortals.

On the next morning, therefore, Chu Yuan-Chang appeared as briskly as ever in the great hall of the gods, carrying not only his little broom of fine twigs but also a large pot with a narrow neck and an armful of arrows.

He made his usual request. The gods lumbered to the ground groaning in an indolent fashion. He dusted the pedestals, taking care to deal with that one upon which Hsi Wang Mu still stubbornly remained in a perfunctory manner only. When all the gods were upon their pedestals again, he cheerfully swept the floor.

That done, a little way in front of Hsi Wang Mu he set his jar upon the floor, and, standing back from it at the proper distance, which placed him just beside the goddess, he began to toss the arrows one by one in an attempt to throw them into the mouth of the jar.

This is a difficult feat; and Chu Yuan-Chang who, it may be, was not exerting the utmost of his skill, met with no success. However, he persisted with what must have appeared to be commendable perseverance. He threw, and threw again, and again.

In the great hall the light was pale and liquid. Only a dazzling bar of light away over by the towering portals reminded one of the hard brilliance of the sunlight in the courtyard. Somewhere down on a distant terrace a gong was being beaten. Inside the hall was a great stillness, and against the background hum of innumerable insects the only sounds were the puffing of the military god, Ching Lu, The Snorter, who was always short of breath after climbing his pedestal, and the click and rattle of Chu Yuan-Chang's arrows as they missed the mouth of the jar and fell to the pavement.

The gods stood still in that heavy, heated shade. Not a movement in all that serried throng. Or was there? Was that a slight motion of languid, power-concealing grace?

Indeed it was so. The astute young Chu Yuan-Chang felt, as he drew himself up after an unsuccessful throw, the most delicate of touches upon his arm. The contact was indeed so soft that he thought for a moment that a but-

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terfly's wing had brushed his sleeve.

But, while he paused, a more significant pressure upon his arm made him aware that he had succeeded in his ruse. He looked up, a little fearfully. Hsi Wang Mu was bending down upon him with a shy smile of entreaty upon a sport-loving face.

Who could be so churlish at that moment as to remember those nine sons and those twenty-four daughters borne, after all, so many thousands of years ago? With the impulsive eagerness of a maiden scarcely of the age for the "testing of the blossom," the goddess stretched a white arm from out of her long red sleeve.

Chu Yuan-Chang humbly offered her an arrow. Grasping it, Hsi Wang Mu leapt lightly down onto the floor, and, with moist lips firmly compressed, leaned forward and flung the arrow towards the jar with a little shriek of excitement. Its barb struck the side of the jar with a dull click. It rattled onto the floor. Hsi Wang Mu made a little rueful smile which the young man was bold enough to answer. Then, leaning well forward, he swung his arrow towards the jar. The same dull click, the same empty rattle announced his failure.

From up in the deep gloom of the roof the contorted faces gazed down upon this amiable sport. Their carved expressions did not alter, so that it would be idle to wonder if some relish of ancient indecorums warmed their regard. But among the images of goddesses a certain restiveness might have been noticed. Tou Mu, cold Goddess of the North Star, in particular, twitched irritably the fingers of all her six hands.

But no thought of these petrified spectators clouded the minds of the two players. Each of them was too preoccupied with the irritation of ill-success. Throw after throw was made. The jar still did not contain one single arrow.

So overcome with petty annoyance was Hsi Wang Mu that she had to lean for an instant in laughing anger upon the firm shoulder of Chu Yuan-Chang. In a moment her head sank in weariness. As lightly as ever Chu had brushed round the hem of her skirt, so softly now her cheek, warm and fragrant, swept the young man's neck.

How nearly then was this game forgot. But Chu, still contestant, made himself take up another arrow. Clink. Clatter. The game was making him unbearably heated. While his goddess made another attempt he rapidly shed his gown, the folds of which had, in any case, much impeded his efforts.

Now, clad only in short tunic and sandals, he made another attempt. With stern joy he saw the arrow fall neatly into the mouth

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of the jar. He turned to Hsi Wang Mu with a laugh of triumph. She, generous in disposition, embraced him.

After a little while, when Chu Yuan-Chang had freed himself, the goddess picked up another arrow. She, too, seemed sensible of the heavy morning heat. With an impatient gesture she flung off the gold scarf that hung over her shoulders. She stooped to throw the arrow.

How tiresomely the long sleeves of her tunic hindered her arms! With practised and unhurried skill she undid all of the little carved golden buttons and flung the tunic aside also. In her gown, white as the magnolia flower, she leaned forward and threw the arrow. It was the click, perhaps, and the clatter that discomposed her. After this failure she turned to Chu, eyes moist, lips down-drooping, like a hurt child.

Perhaps to avoid another embrace Chu patted her cheek and handed her another arrow. With hard eyes the goddess bent again for the throw. She trod on the hem of her gown.

With a little cry of anger Hsi Wang Mu tore her gown from neck to hem and trod it under her feet. Freed of every encumbrance, glowing honey-golden in the pale temple light, she poised herself and flung the arrow with a slim arm. Plop! It landed exactly in the jar's neck. Now two arrows, upright, quivered there together. She turned to Chu Yuan-Chang with a delighted laugh. Alas! He had not been looking at the arrow.

It would not have taken Hsi Wang Mu long to have resumed her garments; but, because of a certain hesitancy which was caused in her by the ardent regard of Chu Yuan-Chang, the moment passed; and other moments followed in which such a rehabilitation would have been discourteous.

While the gods still scowled, laughed, or gnashed their teeth above them these two made play together, the goddess peremptory, the acolyte amazed, alarmed, almost smothered.

So disordered in mind was the young Chu Yuan-Chang that he did not come properly to his senses until the afternoon. The goddess was gone. Her pedestal stood empty. Chu shook his head in bewilderment; and limped away to his belated duties.

And then there began such an afternoon, such an evening, and such a night of unbelievable happenings, as had never been known in the Monastery of the Temple of Heavenly Condescension.

Perhaps Chu, who already knew the ten parts of the matter, was better able than others to note the effects of the errant Goddess of the Pure Essence of Femininity. He would be readier than most,

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perhaps, to perceive upon the faces of usually morose elder brethren impressions of incredulous delight, intense stupefaction, emotional storminess, or extreme distress. What no one could fail to notice was the odd manner in which first one monk and then another, as if in obedience to some unseen invitation, would withdraw quickly from his proper task and absent himself, without pausing for apology.

The master of the neophytes, presiding over the chanting of seemly words for the benefit of wealthy, dead patrons, absented himself. The timekeeper was left to conduct the service with steady clacks on his wooden drum. The young chanters themselves went off, one by one, until only the timekeeper remained.

With darkness the confusion redoubled.

Only with the reluctant daylight did order return. For fear of evil consequences, no monk commented upon the common experience. Only the ruler of the monastery, whose title was The Most Clear, made any remark. He, with laudable other-worldliness, did mention that he had that night experienced a most remarkable dream; made as if to say more; then shook his head.

Everything was now as before. Hsi Wang Mu was back upon her pedestal. The comfortable routine of the Temple of Heavenly Condescension could be resumed.

Indeed, it would have been easy to argue that these happenings had never been. It is true that purchasers of healing talismans on that mad day came back urgently demanding more, and claiming for them virtues far beyond what had ever been imputed to them. But that was not conclusive.

But when Chu Yuan-Chang went to sweep the great hall; and when at his desire the gods and goddesses descended from their pedestals, down with them, but with much more alacrity and grace, leapt Hsi Wang Mu. And by the flash of pale leg one could see that her gown was still torn.

Would that the story ended thus, in tacit embarrassment and wistful regrets. But it must be told that when it was about that season when farmers look with satisfaction upon the rice crop swollen to harvest, Chu Yuan-Chang found himself stealing mistrustful glances at the docile goddess. There seemed to him to be an air of more than admiring self-satisfaction and jauntiness in her aspect. It could not be! In his agitation Chu's fingers plucked his little broom bare of twigs.

Alas! It was so. There was without doubt something softer, something forward-looking about the smile on the wise and lovely face of Hsi Wang Mu.

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For the readers of Fantasy and Science Fiction *who did not attend the World Science Fiction Convention held in Los Angeles in 1958, we offer this photo of the handsome Hugo awarded to winners in the various categories. This particular Hugo, we are proud to say, is the one that was awarded to* F&SF, *as the best professional science fiction magazine of the year.*

It is always gratifying, of course, to receive awards, but we are well aware that a past honor is not a guarantee of future excellence, and we are not lounging comfortably around our offices basking in the reflected silvery sheen of our latest trophy. *F&SF* has always provided the widest possible variety of the best available material in the fields specified in its title. We have brought you virtually every top writer in the science fiction arena—such as Theodore Sturgeon, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Alfred Bester, to name only a few of our regulars—as well as a large number of brilliant writers from other fields—Shirley Jackson, Robert Graves, John Collier, and Aldous Huxley, for example have been among the contributors to recent issues. *F&SF* also published the first stories of such able practitioners as Richard Matheson, Chad Oliver, Philip K. Dick, and Zenna Henderson. These names are only a fraction of the top-calibre names we have brought you in the past—and only a fraction of those we will be bringing you in the near future. Quality has been our hallmark—and it will continue to be so.

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